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**I Crying For Me Who No One Never Hold Before*:
Critical Race Theory and Internalised Racism in
Contemporary African American Children's
and Young Adult Literature**

by

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The sweeping up the heart,
And putting love away
We shall not want to use again
Until eternity.

—Emily Dickinson (1108)

Declaration

The material comprising this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

Abstract

This study focuses on the issue of internalised racism depicted in contemporary African American children's and young adult literature, utilising Critical Race Theory (CRT) as its key theoretical framework. The study addresses three main thesis questions: (i) What effects does internalised racism have on the marginalised characters, and what are its manifestations? (ii) What narrative strategies have been utilised by the authors to help the characters regain and reclaim their sense of self? (iii) What is the contribution of CRT to children's and young adult literature? Through critical analyses of the following texts—Tanita S Davis's (2009) *Mare's War*, Jacqueline Woodson's (2007) *Feathers* and her 1994's *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*, Sharon G Flake's (2005) *Who Am I Without Him* and her 1998's *The Skin I'm In*, and Sapphire's (1996) *Push*—the study examines the effects of internalised racism and offers the young characters the way forward.

From a CRT standpoint, it is argued that the study shifts the boundary of literary landscape and enriches both race and literary scholarships by offering new messages, viewpoints and positions, and, crucially, developing a new critical discourse regarding the issue of internalised racism, particularly in critical literary research representing children's and young adult literature. It defamiliarises the very issue that otherwise has become normalised in American racial discourse, and reaffirms the relevance of 'race, racism, and racialisation' in the American landscape. It also argues that literary texts included in this study are a consequential chapter of African American history, or "a new collective history", which can be used to heal both the individual and the collective, balance the stories, and alter the dominant discourse. The study also analyses the concept of paradigmatic optimism typically found in children's and young adult literature, and argues that this generic feature is not a flaw but is rather a *different* trait.

INTRODUCTION

Wouldn't they be surprised when one day I woke out of my black ugly dream, and my real hair, which was long and blond, would take the place of my kinky mass that Momma wouldn't let me straighten?

—Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1984, p. 4)

I Crying For Me Who No One Never Hold Before*

Claireece Precious Jones or “Precious”, as she is better known in the novel, is an illiterate, obese, dark-skinned protagonist of Sapphire’s (1996) *Push*. Precious loathes herself for being “so stupid, so ugly, worth nuffin” (p. 34), and, having been made part of a racialised landscape, she is led to believe that her existence is nothing but a “vampire sucking the system’s blood. Ugly black grease to be wiped away, punish, kilt, changed, find a job for” (p. 31). In her mind’s eye, however, she is a “beautiful chile like white chile in magazines or on toilet paper wrappers (...) a blue-eye skinny chile whose hair is long braids, long long braids” (p. 64). Upon encountering a stranger’s kindness, Precious cries—“I crying for me who no one never hold before” (p. 18).

When her self-perception is reduced to nothingness—a *vampire sucking the system’s blood*, and when physically morphing herself into a blue-eyed skinny child is her only alternative available, Precious opens up an old, hidden wound that, for centuries, has haunted American Blacks, a wound that has often been treated, unfortunately, as their own individual psychological flaws, leaving them, as a result, in a perpetual state of self-condemnation. It is the representation of this kind of experience of inferiority and its subsequent

psychological devastation portrayed in both fictional and nonfictional works that has become the provenance and premise of this thesis. Whether it is taken directly from lived reality as the one undergone by young Maya Angelou (1984) in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, as cited above, or channelled through fictional characters, the paralleled experience is equally distressing. This study is thus set up to explore through its focus children's and young adult texts such racially silent/silenced experiences, and to *un-silence* them.

Whilst these fictional and nonfictional texts written for both children and adults have certainly paved way for the inception of this study, I need to stress that they do not fully form a complete picture. Growing up in my own *skin* does: the personal experience has greatly helped inform and inspire both the formation and completion of this project. As a result, this journey, inevitably, is made both personal and theoretically driven. It is personal as the experience both in and out of the books is paralleled, almost identical, leaving me at times *tongue-tied*. It is, therefore, important that I acknowledge the personal side for the voice and the drive, however mentally difficult it might be. However, I do believe it is the strength of the theoretical underpinning that will substantiate that voice, and, in turn, give this literary research meaning, enriching both race and literary scholarships.

Both fictional and nonfictional representations cited above have compellingly captured the life of African Americans caught in a racial tide and harmed by self-inflicted psychological mutilations. From a theoretical perspective, this type

of racially and psychologically devastating experience is an example of what has been formally identified as *internalised racism* or *internalised racial oppression* or *psychological slavery* or a much-criticised term *racial self-hatred*. In summary, Precious comes to exemplify a young adult who has been socially and psychologically programmed to perceive herself as being 'less', and who often wishes that she looked more like the dominant group. Unfortunately, this young female character equates black with inferiority and white with beauty and superiority. By tracing her journey, as well as other young fictional characters from the focus texts, from self-denigration to self-affirmation, from invisibility to liberation and empowerment, these children's and young adult texts are not only disclosing an interesting and integral part of the present state of race in contemporary racialised America, particularly its deleterious psychological effects towards the young and vulnerable, but they are also defamiliarising the very racial issue that otherwise has become normalised in American racial discourse. And this is one crucial aim that this study is attempting to uncover and achieve.

Also, what I believe makes this racial issue worth examining or *un-silencing*, given its prevalence as a theme in contemporary African American literature, including children's and young adult literature, is the simple fact that the attention given to it in both race and literary scholarships has been few and far between. Perhaps it is due in part to the discomfort and embarrassment raised by the subject, especially how the blame is always put on victimised individuals as their own psychological flaws instead of structural defects. Another aim of

this study, therefore, is to explore, through fictional representations of the focus texts, whether it is individuals' flaws or structural defects that lie at the heart of this racial malady.

Although the issue of internalised racism has been portrayed in various channels over the years—autobiographies, essays, poetry, films, documentaries, novels—its place in critical literary research, including children's and young adult literature, has been limited, resulting, as shall be discussed further in Chapter 1, Section 1.1, in this racial issue being misunderstood, understudied and, therefore, theoretically void. It is my intention, therefore, to revisit this very issue through the eye of a fictional child, with Critical Race Theory (CRT) as my key theoretical underpinning, to seek new messages, viewpoints and positions on the issue of internalised racism, and also, and crucially, to seek to develop a new critical discourse regarding this silenced racial topic in relation to children's and young adult fiction.

I am drawing on Critical Race Theory (CRT), which is grounded on theoretical, practical, as well as 'activist' dimensions, as my principal analytical tool to approach the focus texts charged with racial conflicts, for some of the following reasons. Firstly, given the pervasiveness of race, racism and racialisation in present-day America, the theory takes into consideration both overt and hidden racial injustice that has still permeated different spheres of contemporary racialised America after the civil rights era. Secondly, it offers multilayered and realistic modes of analysis to explore how various social hierarchies (gender,

class, sexual orientation, etc.) intersect within power relations. Thirdly, and most importantly, CRT also takes into account essential tools needed for psychic survival in a racialised landscape, ones that can help victimised individuals, as represented by young fictional characters, to identify and define themselves as subjects, not objects—a crucial step towards mental decolonisation, as well as individual and group empowerment.

Equally important is its limited role in literary studies, particularly in children's and young adult literature. As I shall discuss further in Chapter 1 under my theoretical/methodological framework, CRT has now been made part of almost every discipline, including the humanities, and yet its role in literary scholarship has been scarce, or very much at its infant stage. A relatively few literary enthusiasts employing CRT as part of their literary analyses tend to put an emphasis only on one aspect of this race theory, particularly its *Intersectionality*, leaving aside and untouched other tenets, such as *Everyday Racism*, *The Social Construction of Race*, *Interest Convergence*, *Differential Racialisation*, *Voice of Colour*, *Counter-Storytelling*, which, arguably, are crucial and equally thought-provoking (see detailed discussions of each tenet in Chapter 1, Section 1.4). In light of this lack of literary research, it is my intention, therefore, to turn the gaze of my study to CRT and make great use of its various tenets to analyse and tackle the issue of internalised racism depicted in contemporary African American children's and young adult literature, to see how well a theory originally developed for legal purposes can help transform a literary landscape.

Each of the above tenets will be carefully and systematically applied to the focus texts at different stages of the thesis to help explain—from literary, racial, social and political perspectives—what lies behind the issue of internalised racism, and what conclusion, if any, can be drawn. And through a combination of these major CRT tenets, I am convinced that it is possible to delve deeper under the skin of this racial issue, as well as to critically analyse its various contributing factors, including the personal, historical, socio-political, as well as the individual and collective. CRT, however, is not the only theoretical and analytical tool used in this study. In order for me to thoroughly examine the complexities of the issue of internalised racism, I am also using an array of both literary and cultural theories, such as Morrison's *American Africanism* or *Africanist Presence*, Collins' *Black Feminist Thought*, Said's *Reflections on Exile*, Kristeva's *Foreignisation*, as well as *Postcolonial* and *Feminist* theory. Like the marriage of the major CRT tenets, the amalgamation of these theoretical views clearly allows me a wider access to the same topic from different angles, resulting, I believe, in a thorough, multilayered, and multidimensional racial analysis that is uniquely African-American. And since the study is interdisciplinary in nature, encompassing both humanities and social studies, looking at one of the pressing social issues in contemporary America through the eye of a fictional child, any theoretical position or conclusion this study is arriving at will certainly help enrich not only literary scholarship, particularly that representing the realm of children's and young adult literature, but also race scholarship.

To obtain a complete picture of how detrimental internalised racism is, as portrayed in the focus children's and young adult texts and based on the three main research questions (see Chapter 1, Section 1.5 for details), I structure my thesis through the following main title headings: WOUNDED, focusing on internalised racism and its psychological manifestation, particularly its relation to the notion of controlling images still prevalent in America today through the media and state apparatuses; TONGUE-TIED, looking at how being made to adhere to the dominant linguistic code can lead fictional characters to being not only linguistically crippled but also historically deprived; MISPLACED/DISLOCATED, delineating what life is like for young American blacks to grow up in a world where formal racist barriers and practices have been made outlawed, exploring the direct aftermath of post-civil rights desegregated America, as well as outlining the new set of challenges and problems facing American blacks, particularly the young and vulnerable; and finally TRIUMPHED, encapsulating the benefit of re-authoring one's own story and reality, delineating, through counter-storytelling, how one can shatter the silence and assert one's own agency, in order to become empowered, liberated and visible. And as children's and young adult literature has often been criticised for its paradigmatic optimism, its fictional representations of young and naïve protagonists possessing the ability and strength to overcome their misfortune, another aim of this study is, therefore, to explore how crucial a role paradigmatic optimism plays in the creation of literary texts penned for children and young adults (see full details of Chapter Outline in Chapter 1, Section 1.7).

African American children's and young adult texts that I have chosen for this study are the following: Tanita S Davis's (2009) *Mare's War*, Jacqueline Woodson's (2007) *Feathers* and her 1994's *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*, Sharon G Flake's (2005) *Who Am I Without Him* and her 1998's *The Skin I'm In*, and Sapphire's (1996) *Push* (see detailed discussions of each text in Chapter 1, Section 1. 6). These literary texts—shaped and informed by cultural practices of present-day America, and driven by an authoritative narrator and an authorial voice and viewpoint—as I shall discuss throughout this study, particularly in Chapter 5, represent a larger construct or a 'reconstructed world'. They portray what is possible through the author's research, memories and recollections, together with the act of imagination. Fundamental racial issues that these texts represent through the life of their young characters, which clearly have an impact on the politics of black identities, as suggested by Cai (2002) in her discussion of stereotyping and the politics of representation in children's and young adult literature, are not just literary or aesthetic issues but also social and political ones. These are texts made up of small and local narratives chronicling everyday lives of (young) ordinary black people who are not part of a 'monumental history' or 'grand narrative', and, like a character from Davis's (2009) *Mare's War*, previously neglected, historically denied, or narratively excluded (Gates, 1998). Another important claim I am making in this study, therefore, is that these texts become not just 'composite stories' with historical significance, but also 'counter-stories', which, as far as storytelling goes, are integral in creating a space for resistance and agency for both the fictional and outside child. My decision to include them as the focus texts is not because of

the numerous awards they have amassed, although that, to a great extent, helps confirm their literary merits, but mainly because they are texts that courageously and compellingly, through the eye of a fictional child, tackle fundamental racial issues affecting the politics of black identities in America today. These are literary texts that address, as suggested by Tessa Hadley in her review of Ian McEwan's new book *The Children Act*, "The intricate workings of institutionalised power" (Hadley, 2014). Also, the fact that they span almost nine decades of American history and capture racial issues that have been silenced during various historical periods, including internalised racism, makes them worthy of a thorough investigation and, therefore, are ideal for this study. To explore the extent of the harm brought on by the issue of internalised racism, particularly its psychological effects, and to develop a new critical discourse surrounding this silenced racial topic, these texts will be read and analysed against various CRT tenets as well as other theoretical viewpoints mentioned above.

When I first started working on the first main chapter of this thesis—WOUNDED—in the early 2012, the shooting of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American teenager from Florida by a neighbourhood watchman George Zimmerman, once again, got everyone's attention and sparked public debates and racial tensions across the nation. Feeling threatened by a 'possible intruder', 28-year-old Zimmerman shot to death the hooded Martin who, as it turned out, bore nothing but a bag of candies and a can of iced tea. Later that year, Jordan Davis, another 17-year-old also from Florida, got shot in a parking

lot of a convenience store yet again by another white man for playing the music too loud. And just recently, on 9 August 2014, as I was writing my CONCLUSION, the shooting of Michael Brown, an 18-year-old African American, by the hand of a white police officer, literally put Ferguson, Missouri, as well as America, on fire. Months in between, more cases of police brutality and racial profiling, particularly those targeting minorities, have been reported, as part of the 'statistics'—"About twice a week, or every three or four days, an African American has been killed by a white police officer" (Wilkerson, 2014). What is even more alarming, statistically, is the fact that whilst two-thirds of the population in Ferguson, Missouri, are African Americans, "its police force is less than 6% black, its city council is 16% black and its school board is 0% black" (Younge, 2014a). Perhaps, this is the reason Captain Ronald Johnson, an African American state highway patrol, has to be brought in to *appease* the rioters, or, as suggested by Swaine and Carroll (2014), "to give a softer face to law enforcement" in Ferguson. The above incidences reveal that how white and black kids are treated, profiled or even killed by the police in America is not proportionately matched—" Even though white Americans outnumber black Americans fivefold, black people are three times more likely than white people to be killed when they encounter the police in the US, and black teenagers are far likelier to be killed by police than white teenagers" (Wilkerson, 2014). For such small missteps, the life of African Americans can be taken away from them—for good. All these examples show that 'race, racism and racialisation', for which this study is arguing, have always been an integral part of the American landscape, and yet they tend to get swept under the 'post-racial,

colourblind' carpet. These cases of racial injustice illustrate real scenarios of everyday life of black kids in post-civil rights America, how their lives are, as put simply by Younge (2014b)—“dispensable, despised, discarded”. Whilst these are not examples of internalised racism themselves, they are examples of behaviours or snapshots of the malaise in the society that arguably have contributed to its cause, making one ultimately fall victim to his or her own prosecution. As commented upon by Wilkerson (2014), “The devaluation of black life in America is as old as the nation itself and has yet to be confronted”. When your image has always been historically and systematically distorted, discredited and devalued in the collective imagination, or painted as threatening and violent as shown in the above cases, as well as in the focus texts through their young African American characters, eventually you start to view yourself through the white gaze, the image seen is, therefore, distorted, ugly, and inferior. The feeling of self-loathing, consequently, is made inevitable. By systematically examining the issue of internalised racism and its detrimental psychological effects, particularly towards the young and vulnerable, as portrayed in contemporary children's and young adult fiction, this study is pushing 'race' to the fore, thus making it relevant, immediate and real.

CHAPTER 1

Critical Race Theory and Internalised Racism in Contemporary African American Children's and Young Adult Literature

1.1 Introduction

Help you how? Tell me. Don't be frightened.
My eyes.
What about your eyes?
I want them blue.

—Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1999, p. 138)

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.

—W E B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1989, p. 3)

This chapter provides key background information of the present study, including, among others, the review of relevant literature, the historical background, the theoretical and methodological framework—Critical Race Theory (CRT), the review of primary texts, the research questions, and, finally, the chapter outline. Following are the six major sections of this chapter: (i) *Malcolm Is Lucky*, discussing relevant literature surrounding the issue of internalised racism, including intra-racial racism; (ii) *Slavery and Internalised Racism*, giving a brief historical overview of skin colour stratification in America, particularly its relation to the issue of internalised racism; (iii) *Critical Race Theory (CRT)*, providing theoretical/methodological framework of the study, including the discussion of key CRT tenets that will be used to analyse the focus texts; (iv) *Research Questions*, stating, through the lens of CRT, a scope of investigation and what the study attempts to achieve; (v) *Review of Primary Texts*, introducing the primary children's and young adult texts, as well as

discussing and justifying their relevance for this study; and (vi) *Chapter Outline*, providing a brief summary of the content of each chapter.

1.2 Malcolm Is 'LUCKY'

In Sharon G Flake's (1998) *The Skin I'm In*, one of the texts included in this study, thirteen-year-old Maleeka Madison is perpetually haunted by her own dark skin and African features, "Somebody said I had hair so nappy I needed a rake to comb it" (p. 13). This feeling of inferiority has landed her at an inner-city school instead of a better school across town as she is threatened by "them girls [who] looked like they come out of a magazine. Long, straight hair. Skin the color of potato chips and cashews and Mary Jane candies. No Almond Joy-colored girls like me" (p. 39). Young Maleeka is also envious of her friend Malcolm at her school for having "a white dad and a black momma" (p. 17), with "long, straight hair [and] skin the color of a butterscotch milkshake" (p. 17). In her very own words, Malcolm is "lucky" simply because he "looks more like his dad than his mom" (p. 17).

From a theoretical perspective, as previously discussed in the Introduction, what young Maleeka is going through is referred to as *internalised racism* or *internalised racial oppression* or *psychological slavery* or a much-criticised term *racial self-hatred* (Pyke, 2010; Kaufka, 2009; Tyson, 2006; Pyke and Dang, 2003; hooks, 2003; 1995; 1994a; Akbar, 1996; 1984; Hall, 1986). Although the issue of internalised racism has been prevalent as a theme in contemporary African

American literature, including children's and young adult literature, the attention given to it has been scarce. Hall (1986) refers to it as one of the most common and least studied features of racism, which is often dubbed 'a dirty little secret' (Pyke, 2010; Golden, 2004; hooks, 2003; 1995; Russell, Wilson and Hall, 1992), owing in part to the discomfort and embarrassment raised by the subject, especially how the blame is always put on victimised individuals as their own flaws. As suggested by Pyke and Dang (2003), "Because internalised racism reveals dynamics by which oppression is reproduced, it will lead to blaming the victims and move attention away from the racist institutions and practices that privilege whites at the expense of people of color" (p. 151). One of the aims of this study, therefore, is to explore, through fictional representations of the focus texts, particularly in Chapter 4, whether it is individuals' flaws or structural defects that lie at the heart of internalised racism.

Whilst the body of research on racism has been extensively carried out, encompassing various academic disciplines, its effects on oppressed individuals—in particular the psychological effects—have been scarcely explored, resulting in the issue of internalised racism being misunderstood, understudied and therefore theoretically void (Speight, 2007; hooks, 2003; Hall, 1986). Speight (2007) argues that internalised racism can be "the most damaging psychological injury that is due to racism" (p. 130). It is, as suggested by Tyson (2006), a direct result of "the psychological programming by which a racist society indoctrinates people of color to believe in white superiority" (p. 362). Hall (1986) defines it as "the subjection of the victims of racism to the

mystifications of the very racist ideology which imprison and define them” (p. 26), or, according to Williams and Williams-Morris (2000), “The acceptance, by marginalized racial populations, of the negative societal beliefs and stereotypes about themselves” (p. 255). Taking a psychological approach, internalised racism is often described as “the individual inculcation of the racist stereotypes, values, images, and ideologies perpetuated by the white dominant society about one’s racial group” (Pyke, 2010, p. 533). It is generally achieved, as suggested by Kaufka (2009), not by coercion, but rather by the oppressed or victimised individuals imposing the dominant culture’s values and norms on their own selves and their communities, believing that such are their true representations. As suggested by Osajima (1993), this type of racism can subconsciously penetrate the victims’ outlook in a subtle manner, or what hooks (2003) refers to as indoctrination, causing them to internalise dominant norms and values without questioning or being consciously aware of their harmful effects.

Theoretically, why racism is internalised can be attributed to two main explanations: being exposed to racism and being acculturated to a racist society (Hipolito-Delgado, 2010; Poupart, 2003; Fortes de Leff, 2002). Those who have suffered internalised racism, as suggested by Tyson (2006), more often than not “feel inferior to whites, less attractive, less worthwhile, less capable, and often wish they were white or looked more white (p. 362). Such feelings consequently lead those victimised or marginalised individuals to negative feelings not only for themselves but also for their own race (Pyke, 2010; Tyson, 2006; Baker, 1983). They are forced to construct their identities in relation to

the racial ideology of the dominant group, resulting in what Osajima (1993) refers to as “the hidden injuries of race” (p. 84). One of the most terrifying fictional representations of internalised racism is given by a prominent contemporary African American literary figure Toni Morrison’s (1999) acclaimed first novel *The Bluest Eye*. The novel captures the life of young Pecola Breedlove who is obsessed and ultimately destroyed by internalised racism. Unloved, shunned and abused by peers, teachers, and parents, Pecola is socially and psychologically programmed to believe that if her eyes were blue she would be pretty, virtuous, and treated nicely by everyone around her, “Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes” (p. 34).

Internalised racism can also give rise to *intra-racial racism*, also known as *colourism* or *colour caste system*. This is the other crucial racial issue that this study is attempting to explain. It is addressed particularly in this study in Chapter 2, where it is depicted and mediated through the eye of a fictional child. Intra-racial racism is essentially racism within race, and generally used to describe a type of racial prejudices, particularly within the black community, that privileges those with lighter skin over ones with more African features (Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992; hooks, 1994a; Tyson, 2006; Collins, 2009;). Schwalbe et al. (2000), cited in Pyke (2010), discuss a similar process known as *defensive othering*, which is what the marginalised employ “to become part of the dominant group or to distance themselves from the stereotypes associated with the subordinate group” (p. 557). By resorting to this process, the

marginalised end up emulating their oppressors (Pyke, 2010). And as this process is instrumental in recreating racial inequality, argue Schwalbe et al. (2000) and Pyke (2010), it is therefore considered a type of internalised racism. A detailed analysis of this concept is the focus of Chapters 2 and 3 of this study. Morrison (1999, p. 57) powerfully and movingly depicts this very concept in *The Bluest Eye* when Claudia, the book's narrator, displays her resentment toward light-skinned Maureen Peal:

We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but lesser. Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world.

Over the years, the issue of internalised racism has found its voice through more diverse channels, for example, autobiographies, essays, poetry, films, documentaries, as well as novels (e.g. Davis, 2009; Diaz, 2008; Woodson, 2007; 1994; Davis, 2005; Flake, 2005; 1998; Golden, 2004; 2003; Walker, 2004; 1984; Morrison, 1999; 1997; Sapphire, 1996; Akbar, 1996; 1984; Graham, 1995; hooks, 1994a; Lee, 1988; Cliff, 1985; Angelou, 1984; Lorde, 1984; Brooks, 1971); however, its place in critical literary research, including children's and young adult literature, has been scarce. The body of research available on this topic, which is very much understudied, has been carried out mainly by researchers in the field of sociology, psychology, cultural studies, education (e.g. Hipolito-Delgado, 2010; Pyke, 2010; Bergner, 2009; Speight, 2007; Pyke and Dang, 2003; Hill, 2002; Hunter, 2002). Literary research available, however limited, is chiefly investigating internalised racism in relation to literary works written for adults, predominantly evolving around Toni Morrison's (1999)

acclaimed novel *The Bluest Eye* (e.g. Bump, 2010; Bergner, 2009; Yancy, 2008; Pabst, 2003; Plasa, 2000; Mori, 1999; Cormier-Hamilton, 1994). The relatively few critical works coming out of children's and young adult literature relate to racism *per se* and are inclined to put their focus on the intersection of race, class, and gender, as well as the issue of incest (e.g. Frever, 2009; Rogers and Christian, 2007; Michlin, 2006; Enekwechi & Moore, 1999), or on racial issues facing non-Indigenous children (Bradford, 2007; 2010), leaving the issue of internalised racism untouched. Clearly, it has been neglected or perhaps 'othered' by both literary and non-literary scholars. It is my intention, therefore, to revisit this very issue through the eye of a fictional child, with Critical Race Theory (CRT) as my key theoretical frame, to seek new messages, viewpoints and positions on the issue of internalised racism, and also, and crucially, to seek to develop a new critical discourse regarding this silenced racial topic in relation to children's and young adult fiction. I believe literature is a powerful, multi-layered narrative not only essential in making visible various social issues and phenomena, but also capable of offering or possibly altering new social discourses and practices. It is a world-affiliated cultural object (Said, 1988) that represents a larger construct or a "reconstructed world" (Hrushovski 1976, p. 7, cited in Rimmon-Kenan, 2002, p. 6), and it is also driven by an authoritative narrator and an authorial voice and viewpoint (see further discussion of the importance of literary texts in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.). Although perceived at times as being too utopian in its fictional approach, as will be subsequently discussed in Chapter 5, children's and young adult literature does possess the power to reflect, both directly and indirectly, societies, cultures, ideologies,

prejudices, clichés and histories, just like its adult counterpart and other academic disciplines (O’Sullivan, 2011; Bradford, 2010; Butts, 1992; Becker, 1973).

1.3 Slavery and Internalised Racism

The slavery that captures the mind and imprisons the motivation, perception, aspiration and identity in a web of anti-self images, generating a personal and collective self-destruction, is more cruel than the shackles on the wrists and ankles. The slavery that feeds on the mind, invading the soul of man, destroying his loyalties to himself and establishing allegiance to forces which destroy him, is an even worse form of capture.

—Na’im Akbar, *Breaking the Chains of Psychological Slavery* (1996, v)

As his dying words, Mr Kurtz, the enigmatic, power-corrupt character in Joseph Conrad’s (2007) *Heart of Darkness*, utters—“The horror! The horror!” (p. 98). The reading of these four compelling words, as well as the novella itself, has generated hot debates, yielding numerous interpretations. Not only have the words come to signify the horror of imperialism and slavery, the atrocity committed against the African natives, the corrupting power of man and wilderness, but including also in their interpretation, I believe, is the depiction of the black others in the western thought through the use of disparaging images, and how such images have been methodically constructed and sustained. Through the main narrator Charlie Marlow, and an unnamed narrator, Conrad’s descriptions of the natives are dehumanising, horrific, animal-like: “See from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening (...) they had faces like grotesque masks” (p. 18); “Mostly black and naked, moved about like ants (...) black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind waggled to and fro like tails” (p. 20). In sum, as succinctly and repeatedly stated

by Marlow, “They are simple people” (p. 75). The image of the whites, on the contrary, is that of “the great knights-errant of the sea” (p. 5), whose noble mission is to ‘civilise’ and ‘enlighten’ the natives, “Weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways” (p. 16), or what Frantz Fanon (1967) refers to in *Black Skin, White Masks* as “Sin is Negro as virtue is white” (p. 106).

When Alice Walker (1984) recounts her own mother’s story in *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, she gives us a startling account of how her mother, although thought of by most as a strong black woman, was still socially and culturally programmed to “subordinate” her soul to the “Beautiful White People” (p. 123). Her mother was convinced that if she did not look or think like them, “She was a nobody” (p. 124). She asked whether whites were “jest naturally smarter, prettier, better” (p. 123). As Walker later arrives at a disheartened conclusion, “Black was not a color on my mother; it was a shield that made her invisible” (p. 124).

A return to slavery and the racist ideology that has been advocated since the period of European colonialism is made inevitable if one is to unearth the origin of internalised racism. For, as suggested by Hunter (2005), it is the Europeans and European Americans who exerted their power to “culturally, politically, and economically dominate Africans (...) created a “white is right” culture” (p. 17), justifying their colonisation and enslavement of black people. Resorting to ‘black inferiority’, as suggested by Cai (2002), is part of whites’ justification. As also fictionally depicted by Junot Díaz (2008) in his Pulitzer Prize winning *The*

Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, “It is believed that the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola unleashed the fukú on the world, and we’ve all been in the shit ever since” (p. 1). It is the slavery and racist ideology that ultimately cause black people to turn inward, putting, as suggested by Akbar (1996), the “shackles” on their own “wrists and ankles”, generating, as a consequence, “a personal and collective self-destruction” (v).

Historically, internalised racism was inextricably linked to violence, as well as the dehumanisation that whites employed to gain control over both black men and women during the slavery era (Hunter, 2005; Roberts, 1997). To gain social order and control, white men often resorted to sexual violence, particularly rape, as a form of terror against the entire slave community, resulting in (i) the increase of racially mixed children and (ii) the formation of a colour hierarchy favouring African Americans with lighter skin (Hunter, 2005; Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992).

The first result was made possible by the Rule of Hypodescent, or the One Drop Rule, which defined any individuals with one drop of black blood as blacks (Davis, 1991). This racist policy, which made enslavement of black people legal, enabled white men to repeatedly rape black women to produce more slaves, for any child born to a black mother at that time was considered black (Billingsley, 1968). It was further exploited later on to keep black people from gaining access to scarce resources and participating in any political, economic and educational opportunities (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Collins, 2009; Hunter,

2005). Also, the policy was used as a form of terror to achieve social order and control, as it terrified black women and made black men feel castrated by their inability to keep their women from being sexually violated (Hunter, 2005; Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992). As a result, America saw a significant increase of racially mixed children of various skin tones scattering across its landscape.

Miscegenation also gave rise to a colour hierarchy, a system that privileged lighter-skinned African Americans over their darker-skinned counterparts. These lighter-skinned blacks, or the mulattoes, were served as a 'buffer class' between whites and blacks, as it was believed that their presence—being offspring of and physically approximating whites—minimised the strain between blacks and whites (Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992; hooks, 1982). As a result, special privileges and status, such as education, labour and manumission opportunities, including better treatments by overseers, were often reserved for this group, as most whites believed that mulattoes were more intelligent and capable, thus visibly creating frictions within the black community, or what is known as intra-racial racism or colourism, as previously discussed (Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992; Stevenson, 1996; Frazier, 1951). And as these light-skinned blacks started running their own businesses and taking up leadership positions, 'white blood' was therefore (mis)interpreted as the main ingredient for any human success, suggesting, sadly, that there was a close connection between one's antecedent and intelligence (Hunter, 2005).

Meanwhile, to justify whites' enslavement of black people, racist ideologies

were systematically constructed. Black people and blackness came to be defined in binary opposition to their white counterpart, elevating one to the level of “Justice, Truth, Virginity” (Fanon, 1967, p. 139), or “Children of God, full-fledged human beings” (Omi and Winant, 2000, p. 192), and condemning the other to ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality, savagery, irrationality, inferiority (Cai, 2002; Morrison, 1992; hooks, 1982; Fanon, 1967; Memmi, 1965). Most public discourses were created and seen solely through these binary oppositions (Hunter, 2005). Not only did these racist, hegemonic ideologies create frictions and divisions within the black community, they also caused blacks to emulate and internalise the ‘white is right’ culture, resulting in their own self-hatred and destruction (Hunter, 2005; Akbar, 1996; hooks, 1994a; Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992).

It is no surprise, therefore, for Alice Walker’s mother, a strong black woman, to think of whites as “jest naturally smarter, prettier, better” (Walker, 1984, p. 123), to feel validated only when she looked and thought like whites; for Maya Angelou (1984), *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, to secretly hope that one day she would wake out of her “black ugly dream, and my real hair, which was long and blond, would take the place of the kinky mass” (p. 4); for literary characters from children’s and young adult texts such as Precious from Sapphire’s (1996) *Push*, not to think so highly of her own teacher “Don’t care if she teacher, don’t no niggers start on time” (p. 38); and for Erika from Flake’s (2004) *Who Am I Without Him*, to feel embarrassed by her black peers for speaking in their black tongue, and wonder why they cannot “speak *good English*” (p. 101, italics in

original). For both these real and fictional characters have been socially and psychologically programmed to view themselves through the white gaze, as a result of racist ideologies and the remnants of a tragic past, the images seen are therefore distorted, ugly, inferior. Through both fiction and nonfiction writings, startling accounts of those psychologically mutilated by internalised racism have been captured and substantiated. As stated at the onset, returning to slavery and racist ideologies advocated since the emergence of European colonisation is a necessary step to unravel internalised racism. For it is the starting point of how this very issue comes to take shape, how it is sustained and still lingering on today.

1.4 Theoretical/Methodological Framework: *Critical Race Theory*

Too often literature and culture are presumed to be politically, even historically innocent; it has regularly seemed otherwise to me, and certainly my study of *Orientalism* has convinced me (and I hope will convince my literary colleagues) that society and literary culture can only be understood and studied together.

—Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978, p. 27)

On the surface, racism in America appears to be a ‘thing of the past’ (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Tyson, 2006), and one can easily be led to believe in such a claim, as most of the overt forms of violence or discrimination against African Americans that America had seen in the past are no longer part of the current US climate, for they are generally successfully intervened either in the court of law or through other legal channels. A great number of African American writers, politicians, musicians, actors, directors, athletes, and many others, in the past few decades, have tremendously enjoyed both national and

international recognition and fame. In addition, a recent phenomenon—an African American presence in the White House, which is perhaps most historically, politically and socially momentous, has certainly helped create a global image of America as a country of equal rights and opportunities—for all, or what Coates (2012) refers to as “a triumph of integration” (p. 1). With such progress made in law and politics, is it fair to say that America has now entered its post-racial era? Is a racially ambitious term such as ‘racelessness’ (Bernard, 2011) a fitting description for its current landscape? If so, should we not, then, give racism ‘a rest’ and move on?

As much as one likes to argue that racism is a thing of the past and that America is now enjoying or living in a post-racial age, when, in practice, “infant death rates among minorities nearly double those of whites, and school dropout rates among blacks and Latinos worse than those in practically any industrialized country” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 47); when it is statistically documented that “black men are seven times more likely to be incarcerated than white men” (Bernard, 2011, p. 14), and that “black men who murder whites are executed at a rate nearly ten times that of whites who murder blacks” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 127); when not a single one out of eight hundred engineering students admitted to the University of California at Berkeley in 2005 was African American (Goldberg, 2006); when poverty only “has a black or brown face” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 12); or “how many faces of power can you think of that are brown?” (Young, 2003, p. 4)—racism has never left the building. It only takes different forms. As Hall (1997) remarks,

even when it has been shown out through the front door, it (racism) “tends to sidle around the veranda and crawl in the window” (cited in Lentin 2008, p. 46). Racial injustice in the United States is still a major and pressing problem; it is simply become less visible than it used to be. As further suggested by Tyson (2006), “Racial injustice is practiced on the sly, so to speak, to avoid legal prosecution, and it has flourished in ways that, in many cases, only its victims really know well” (p. 367). As for the term ‘racelessness’ that has now been part of the social and racial discourse, argues Bernard (2011), it reflects nothing but “an ambition to turn away from the realities of difference. It is code for a common ambition to avoid the realities of institutional racial inequalities, as well as personal experiences of cultural difference” (p. 5). All this clearly shows that the civil rights of many African Americans are still in jeopardy, the very reason to look for a new way or theory to tackle, argue Delgado and Stefancic (2012), “The subtler forms of racism that were gaining ground” (p. 4).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was initiated as a recognised body of critical enquiry in the mid 1970s by such critics as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman and Richard Delgado. It first took root at a time when the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s seemed to reach an impasse and thus ceased to be a political or social force. It is a direct response to both overt and hidden racial injustice that has still permeated different spheres of contemporary racialised America after the civil rights era. Unlike the civil rights movement, which aimed at dismantling overtly racist political practices and social divisions, failing to recognise, as suggested by Schur (2004) that “race, racism and racialisation are

not always fully intentional acts or processes but by-products of a society with a particular history and culture” (p. 297), CRT explores how the idea of race “infects common interactions even among people arguably of the same race” (p. 297).

As a movement, CRT, which encompasses both intellectual and activist dimensions, revolves around the connection among race, racism, and power (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). As an interdisciplinary movement, CRT, states Schur (2004), is aimed at establishing a “rights analysis that can challenge a wide variety of seemingly innocuous cultural practices that maintain the ideological importance of race” (p. 297). What makes the movement different is the fact that it puts the various issues concerning race under a wider scope, including, as suggested by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), “Economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3). CRT concerns itself with every topic that is relevant to race. It seeks to examine the complexity of race, in particular its relation to our everyday experiences, how the two are unconsciously connected (Tyson, 2006), in order to find out how pervasive racism still is in modern day America. Moreover, as remarked by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), CRT also features an “activist dimension”, suggesting that “it tries not only to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better” (p. 7). One of its strengths clearly lies in its multi-layered approach to race-based criticism, offering new, practical and realistic modes to explore how

various social hierarchies (gender, class, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, etc.) intersect within power relations—the notion known within the CRT framework as *Intersectionality* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Collins, 2009; Tyson, 2006; Crenshaw, 1991).

Although it started out as a critique of constitutional law, CRT has spread to almost every discipline, including the humanities. Though often carried out without an activist dimension, researchers in education, political science and ethnic and gender studies have now considered themselves critical race theorists, utilising CRT to investigate pressing issues concerning their own disciplines, making CRT even more fast-growing (e.g. Tillery, 2009; Novkov, 2008; Fong, 2008; Chapman, 2007; Duffy, 2005; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004; Watts & Erevelles 2004; Andersen, 2001; Tate, 1994; Delgado, 1989). However, in literary studies, including children's and young adult literature, the role of CRT is still limited. A few literary enthusiasts employing CRT as part of their literary analyses, which are done only partially and indirectly, tend to put their emphases either only on the issue of *Intersectionality*, focusing on the intersection of race, class, and gender, or on the legal aspect of the work (e.g. Perry, 2005; Lenz, 2004; Schur, 2004), leaving aside and untouched other tenets of CRT, such as *Everyday Racism*, *Interest Convergence*, *Differential Racialisation*, *Voice of Colour* and *Counter-Storytelling*. These neglected aspects of CRT arguably are crucial and equally thought-provoking. In light of this lack of literary research, it is my intention therefore to turn the gaze of my study to CRT and make great use of its various tenets to analyse and tackle the issue of

internalised racism depicted in contemporary African American children's and young adult literature, to see how well a theory originally developed for legal purposes can help transform a literary landscape, how complementary they both are, and, as precisely echoed by Edward Said (1978) in *Orientalism*, how interconnected or interdependent academic disciplines can be or should be.

As the nature of this study is primarily library-based, specific CRT tenets utilised as part of its theoretical underpinning will be briefly discussed. To analyse the issue of internalised racism in contemporary African American children's and young adult literature, the following tenets commonly shared and acknowledged by most critical race theorists will be employed:

1. *Everyday Racism*

As suggested by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), Tyson (2006), Burstow (2003), Essed (2002), and Harrell (2000), the most stressful and psychologically harrowing forms of racism are not the overt and deliberate types that can be intervened legally, but the mundane ones that non-white minorities have to deal with on a daily basis, such as being watched or followed in stores by security personnel, being ignored while waiting in line or being treated condescendingly by white people, or being made inferior or less intelligent by an authority. For the victimised individuals, coping with everyday racism is stressful, psychologically and physically upsetting because, as suggested by Essed (2002), its effects are cumulative, "One event triggers memories of other,

similar incidents” (p. 207). Part of the reason that everyday racism is very distressing is the fact that those who commit or witness it might not even be aware of the incident or wound they have inflicted. Furthermore, as pointed out by Essed (2002), though most people believe that racism should not exist, “There is insufficient inter/national commitment to educate children, inform adults, and provide citizens with relevant information about how to identify racism, how it is communicated, how it is experienced, and how it can be countered” (p. 204).

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison (1999), through her protagonist Pecola Breedlove, demonstrates how detrimental and psychologically damaging this type of everyday racism can be. Although Pecola is a paying customer, Mr Yacobowski, a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper, eyes her with a “total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness” (p. 36). When she hands him the money, he “hesitates, not wanting to touch her hand (...) Finally he reaches over and takes the pennies from her hand. His nails graze her damp palm” (p. 37). When Pecola leaves the store, she once again sees herself as someone ugly and meaningless as a weed straining through a crack in the sidewalk. This type of daily racism— keeping a physical distance from a person of colour or avoiding touch or so-called contact avoidance (Essed, 2002)—is psychologically devastating, and it can eat away at one’s self-esteem and self-worth. In this study, *Everyday Racism* is one of

the main tenets that will be utilised in both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 to explain psychological wounds and linguistic violence brought on by internalised racism portrayed in the focus texts, particularly Sapphire's (1996) *Push* and Flake's (1998) *The Skin I'm In* and her 2005's *Who Am I Without Him*.

2. Interest Convergence

This tenet is initially a term used by Derrick Bell (1980) in his article entitled "*Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest Convergence Dilemma". Bell states in the article that racism is common in the United States because it often converges or overlaps with the interest of the dominant group, or whites. *Brown v. Board of Education*, possibly the most famous legal case marking a critical historical moment regarding racial segregation in America, and multicultural education campaigns of the 1990s are two good examples of how this tenet had been (mis)used for the benefit of the dominant group.

Brown v. Board of Education was heavily criticised by strong supporters of CRT as being politically exploited and manipulated. Bell (1980) argues that *Brown* is not an issue of ethics but of politics, suggesting that by abandoning segregation, the supreme court decision, first and foremost, "helped to provide immediate credibility to America's struggle with communist countries to win the hearts and minds of emerging third world people" (p. 524). In order to gain support from the third world

nations, it was imperative that America change its racist image (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Bell (1980) also asserts that *Brown* helps reassure American blacks that America is not a dangerous ground but a land of equal opportunity, of desegregation (see detailed discussion in Chapter 4).

Through the lens of Black Feminist Thought, an intellectual enterprise of the current black feminist movement in the United States, *Interest Convergence* rings a similar tune to the notion of *symbolic inclusion* (Collins, 2009; Carby, 1992). In the late 1980s, as the neoliberal backlash against race-conscious equalisation policies gained force, multicultural education was then called for, suggesting that a multicultural curriculum would introduce positive role models and instil racial pride, which would, in turn, enhance self-esteem and lead to greater academic achievement (Powell-Hopson and Hopson, 1988). Such a move has helped put the texts of black women writers, which had previously been ignored or marginalised, into the classroom across the country, and yet actual black women are still not part of the classroom setting (Carby, 1992). The same is also true with most feminist publications that tend to keep black women's writings out of their circulations, except, as pointed out by Audre Lorde (1984), "Special Third World Women's Issues" (p. 113). The nation's focus on multiculturalism seems to bring the interest of both blacks and whites together, but as novelist Salman Rushdie (1991) argues, multiculturalism, like 'integration' or 'racial harmony',

despite its 'virtuous and desirable' tune, is nothing but "an invitation (for blacks) to shut up and smile while nothing was done about our grievances" (p. 137). Symbolic inclusion, therefore, as stated by Collins (2009), "Often substitutes for bona fide substantive changes" (p. 8). Many critical race theorists consider *Interest Convergence* one of the primary causes of racism because it has become part of the bigger picture that controls social, political and cultural practices within the country (Tyson, 2006). This tenet will be used as a key theoretical tool in Chapter 4 to analyse Jacqueline Woodson's (2007) *Feathers* and her 1994's *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*, looking at how political and social changes affect the life of young black kids, how desegregated America creates further sense of displacement and dislocation.

3. The Social Construction of Race

A central theme of this tenet holds that race is not a biological category, but rather a socially constructed one, or what Omi and Winant (2000) refer to as "an unstable and "decentered" complex of social meaning" (p. 183). Though originally introduced by natural scientists in the field of natural history as a means to refer to groups of peoples in different geographic locations, the concept of race, by the nineteenth century, was abused by scientists in general to establish the relationship between physical differences and cultural hierarchy, subsequently putting human beings into different races, asserting, unfortunately, that some were superior to the others (Tyson, 2006; Ashcroft, 2001). Although the

concept of race as a biological category has later on been eliminated from the field of natural sciences, no one, unfortunately, as suggested by Muir (1993), has made any “organized effort to bring this rejection to the attention of schools, government, general public, or even related disciplines” (p. 102).

Being regarded perhaps as one of the very first and most well-known books to investigate the psychology of colonialism, Frantz Fanon’s (1967) *Black Skin, White Masks* clearly helps unmask this invented and manipulated notion of race through his discussion of an idealised Negro. *Black Skin, White Masks* discloses—through colonialism and racism—the danger of such a constructed image, how it can result in the colonised being ridiculed, demonised, declared inferior and irrational, and, in some cases, eliminated. In his portrayal of the idealised Negro, Fanon (1967) writes, “what is often called the black soul is a white man’s artifact” (p. 6), emphasising once again that race is not a biological but socially-constructed category, one that sees blacks and whites get caught in a perpetual state of binary opposition, with one end of the spectrum—the superior end—being forever occupied by the white oppressors, leaving the ‘inferior’ or ‘othered’ end with various kinds of physical and mental scars, including what he terms *inferiority complex*, a condition “created by the death and burial of the colonised’s local cultural originality” (p. 9). This inferiority complex is a direct result of how the colonised are constantly represented in the collective unconsciousness as a symbol of

“ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality” (p. 149), whereas whiteness, as asserted by Fanon, is always self-elevated to the level of “Justice, Truth, Virginity” (p. 139). What concerns Fanon is the fact that the black man is required not only to be black but “he must be black in relation to the white man” (p. 83), for this could lead to the process of internalisation, or what he calls *epidermalization*, of the inferiority complex, causing the colonised to emulate the oppressors’ norms and—through the mechanism of racism—end up loathing themselves, “As I being to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro” (p. 153).

The concept of race as a social construction is also echoed in Edward Said’s (1978) much celebrated and controversial book *Orientalism* and Toni Morrison’s (1992) *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. In *Orientalism*, Said (1978) describes the various means—academic disciplines, styles of thought, and corporate institutions—the West had come to know the Orient over several centuries, particularly during the nineteenth century imperialism. Like Fanon’s (1967) idealised Negro, the Orientals—through textual creations—were constructed as “irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, different” (Said, 1978, p. 40), whereas the white Europeans were “rational, virtuous, mature, normal” (Said, 1978, p. 40). These representations are made possible chiefly because Orientalism, as suggested by Said (1978), is considered a discipline, “It is taught, it has its own societies, periodicals,

traditions, vocabulary, rhetoric (...) connected to and supplied by the prevailing cultural and political norms of the West” (pp. 67-68). Said’s *imaginative geography* is perhaps an extended metaphor of how the West constructed the Orient through this binary opposition. This theatrical concept, argues Said (1978, p. 63), suggests that:

The Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe.

The point is that the Orient, while appearing to exist objectively, has only a ‘fictional reality’, a constructed image for the West to justify its domination.

Morrison’s (1992) ‘American Africanism’ or ‘Africanist Presence’ also suggests how race is socially fabricated and manipulated in white America’s literary imagination. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison (1992) proposes a new reading method to approach American literature from an African American perspective, emphasizing the importance of an Africanist presence in American literature. This Africanist presence, however, is a white construct deployed to project and explore fears and desires that “reside in the writerly conscious” (Morrison, 1992, p. 17). Its result, therefore, as she contends, is a “fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American” (Morrison, 1992, p. 38). Like Said’s (1978)

imaginative geography, African Americans are negatively constructed and conceived in the white *mental landscape* or literary imagination as “raw, savage” (Morrison, 1992, p. 45). Morrison’s newly proposed reading method clearly reflects what Ralph Ellison (1964) movingly articulated almost three decades ago in his essay critiquing the 20th century American fiction and its treatment of the black others. In “Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity”, included in his first book of essays *Shadow and Act*, Ellison (1964) appears almost mournful over the construction and representation of the American blacks in the modern literary tradition. The image depicted, he comments, is so skewed that one (the Negro), upon a glimpse of his own translated self, feels “drained of humanity” (p. 25). Since the dawn of the American Colonies, he asserts that black Americans were never part of “the democratic master plan” (p. 29), and to make whites become more human, they were thus “elected to undergo a process of institutionalized dehumanization” (p. 29). What includes or, to borrow Morrison’s (1992) words, “resides in the writerly conscious” (p. 17), therefore, is nothing but the dehumanised American blacks—“What you’d have the world accept as *me* isn’t even human” (Ellison, 1964, p. 25).

Through these representations and fundamental binary divisions, Fanon (1967), Said (1978) and Morrison (1992) clearly illustrate how the social construction of race—through Colonialism, Orientalism, and American Africanism—has caused the colonised, Orientals, and African

Americans to feel ridiculed, demonised, and inferior, how they have been made to carry the psychological scars that are still visible even today. In this study, this tenet and CRT's *Differential Racialisation*, which is going to be discussed next, are two key tenets underlying most of the following chapters.

4. Differential Racialisation

This tenet certainly helps strengthen the fact that race is not a biological but socially constructed and manipulated category, as it holds that race, other than being socially constructed, is also constructed, at different times, in response to the shifting needs of the dominant group (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). How the minorities are racialised at different historical periods depends on the needs of the white society, which once again resonates Fanon's (1967) very idea that the black man is required not only to be black, but "he must be black in relation to the white man" (p. 83).

African Americans, as a result, have been historically racialised and depicted in a manner that serves the perceived needs of the mainstream white America, from the mammies and breeder women of the slave era to black female bitches/prostitutes or all-purpose "*hos*" and welfare mothers of contemporary America (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991; 2 Live Crew, 1989). In *Outlaw Culture*, bell hooks (1994a) states that the tragic effect of possessing the sense of self-loath, as a result of these

controlling images continually presented by the mass media, is evidently hardest on the youngsters who are “striving to construct positive identity and healthy self-esteem” (p. 211), as illustrated by authors of texts chosen for this study.

Also, as suggested by Collins (2009), Tyson (2006) and Hunter (2005), in order to justify their enslavement of black people before the Civil War, white Americans deliberately depicted them as simple-minded, in need of white supervision and happy to serve whites. Later, when thought to be in competition with whites for jobs, African Americans were painted as threatening, prone to violence, and lazy. These controlling images and stereotypes, however racist, sexist, misrepresented and illogical, get shifted from one period to another depending on the needs of the dominant group, and they have been fundamental to the oppression of black people (Collins, 2009). Coupled with racism, sexism and classism, a number of African Americans, unfortunately, have internalised these controlling images and stereotypes and come to believe that they are true depictions of their own selves (Brown-Collins and Sussewell, 1986). How these harmful images can lead to the issue of internalised racism will be discussed in great length in Chapter 2, particularly in relation to Sapphire’s (1996) *Push* and Flake’s (1998) *The Skin I’m in*.

5. Intersectionality

Another key component of CRT is *Intersectionality*, which, according to

Delgado and Stefancic (2012), is described as “the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various settings” (p. 57). To put it simply, one’s identity is complex and not based on race alone. Race is built on various intersectional factors, such as class, sex, educational background, sexual and political orientation, religious affiliation, “Everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 10). And when a minority occupies more than one of these categories, such as Precious, a young character from Sapphire’s (1996) *Push*, who is illiterate, obese, black and female, such a person will inevitably experience multiple forms of oppression. In her article investigating the violence against women of colour, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) states that the notion of *Intersectionality*, unfortunately, is often ignored when it comes to the politics of identity, asserting that intragroup differences are always conflated, making it extremely difficult to get to the root cause of female battery, as each female experience is often shaped by other dimensions of her identity, such as race, class, sexual, political and socioeconomic orientation.

The following excerpt from Morrison’s (1999, p. 108) *The Bluest Eye* essentially epitomises these multiple forms of oppression, suggesting how vital a role *Intersectionality* has played in racialised America. Through her female characters, Morrison discloses how race and gender intersect, how these ‘disadvantaging factors’ can lead to racial and

gender oppression:

Then they had grown. Edging into life from the back door. Becoming. Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders. White women said, "Do this," White children said, "Give me that." White men said, "Come here." Black men said, "Lay down." The only people they need not take orders from were black children and each other.

It is apparent that race and gender intersect, and that gender oppression cannot be understood apart from racial oppression. A black woman is put in such a disadvantage position not because she is a woman but because she is a black woman, which, according to Tyson (2006) is "a category that has been defined *historically* in America as less valuable than the category of white women" (p. 106, my italics). The above fictional depiction also demonstrates that these black women are at the bottom of the social ladder and unescapably put in a 'double bind' situation: "They could expect neither gender solidarity from white women nor racial solidarity from black men, the two groups on whom they should have been able to count for help" (Tyson, 2006, p. 106). *Intersectionality* is another key tenet that will be used as part of a critical analysis to explain fictional representations of internalised racism in Chapter 2. In order to gain a more thorough racial analysis, particularly in this study, another equally important intersectional factor is also proposed and made part of CRT's *Intersectionality*, and that is *childhood or youth*.

6. *Voice of Colour*

This tenet holds that writers and thinkers of minorities “may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 10). However, it needs to be pointed out that CRT does not promote the concept of racial essentialism, an idea that enables an oppressed individual to gain insight into the operations of oppression by the very fact of being black or brown. Rather, the ability to speak and write about race and racism, as outlined in CRT, is learned through the experience of racial oppression by those who have lived that reality, suggesting that *Voice of Colour* is in fact socially acquired, not biologically inherited. This view is also shared by Clare Bradford (2007, 2010) in her discussions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children’s texts, particularly from a postcolonial viewpoint. Bradford (2007) argues in *Unsettling Narratives* that Indigenous texts are not necessarily better or more authentic than non-Indigenous texts; they are not entirely “free of stereotypes and colonial mythologies” (p. 11) when it comes to the depiction of indigeneity, as they too are infiltrated by colonial ideologies through the process of internalisation that Indigenous people have been subjected to. What makes them different, however, as she states in “Race, Ethnicity and Colonialism”, which clearly reflects CRT’s social-acquisition hypothesis, is the fact that “non-Indigenous texts are much more likely than Indigenous texts to recycle the assumptions of dominant cultures” (Bradford, 2010, p. 45). Therefore, an anti-essentialism thesis held

firmly by CRT still stands.

As a critical social theory, CRT considers *Voice of Colour* a crucial element that should be utilised by members of an oppressed group to recount and rearticulate their own stories regarding racism—for their own individual and collective self-definitions and standpoints, which ultimately could lead to their own survival in a racist and sexist society. As precisely pointed out by Audre Lorde (1984) in *Sister Outsider*, “If we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others—for their use and to our detriment” (p. 45). Once self-definition is re-established and rearticulated, self-love will return, as echoed by Maleeka Madison, a young female protagonist in Flake’s (1998) *The Skin I’m In*—“Call me by my name! I’m not ugly. I’m not stupid. I’m Maleeka Madison, and, yeah, I’m black, real black, and if you don’t like me, too bad ‘cause black is the skin I’m in!” (p. 167). This tenet, together with *Counter-Storytelling*, which will be discussed below, has formed part of the main theoretical tool in Chapter 5.

7. Counter-Storytelling

One distinctive factor differentiating CRT from the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s is its attention to how everyday experiences and common interactions of the marginalised are tainted or infected by race and racism. To expose how pervasive and thriving racism still is today, critical race theorists like Derrick Bell, Patricia Williams, Richard

Delgado, Jean Stefancic, Mari Matsuda, Renata Lawson, Daniel Solorzano, William Tate—among many others—have resorted to a technique traditionally rooted in the social sciences and humanities—storytelling, providing a new platform for those marginalised, previously voice-less individuals to recount their stories. Well-told and engaging stories, as suggested by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), can help readers, as they venture into a new and unfamiliar world, understand what life is like for others. Powerfully written stories and narratives, they further added, “May begin a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 50).

Drawing on a long history of narratives culturally embedded in different marginalised minority groups, these critical race ‘storytellers’ offer an alternative for the minority to deconstruct, analyse, challenge or even ‘mock’ the *majoritarian story*—“a bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant race bring to the discussion of race” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, p. 462), and reconstruct their new ones that are not often told and heard. As further added by Delgado (1989), “Oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation” (p. 2436).

Lawson (1995) and Delgado (1989), cited in Solorzano and Yosso (2001,

p. 475), also state that these counter-stories can serve at least four theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical functions:

(1) They can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice; (2) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems; (3) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position; and (4) they can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone.

When it comes to social injustice, counter-stories, as strongly advocated by critical race storytellers, are powerful tools that not only help victimised individuals reconstruct their own realities through their own voice, but also make them realise that there are others who share similar experiences. Counter-stories also help the oppressed define themselves from their own standpoints and identify themselves as subjects, not objects—a crucial step toward individual and group empowerment (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1989; Lorde, 1984). One effective way for the oppressed to combat discrimination, as suggested also by hooks (1989) is “by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, *telling their story*” (p. 43, my italics). These, perhaps, are some of the reasons why counter-storytelling is a powerful analytical tool that has become more and more accepted in CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

At the end of their book on *Critical Race Theory*, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2012) states—“Perhaps if the new outsider scholars—and new converts and fellow travelers—persist, their work in time will come to seem not so strange or even radical, and change may come to American society, *however slowly and painfully*” (p. 150, my italics). As an outsider looking in on racialised America through the lens of CRT, I hope this study itself will become another ‘counter-story’ that helps construct a better and fairer discourse, one in which those harsh realities truly experienced by the marginalised as captured in children’s and young adult literature are disclosed.

Together, these CRT tenets will be applied to the analysis of these selected examples of literary works written for children and young adults to see how they can help transform a literary landscape; specifically, how they can help shed new light on the issue of internalised racism portrayed in contemporary American children’s and young adult literature.

1.5 Research Questions

Principally, the present study is focusing on the interplay between Critical Race Theory and the issue of internalised racism represented in contemporary African American children’s and young adult literature, how well a theory originally developed as a critique of constitutional law can help transform a literary landscape. This, therefore, leads to the following thesis questions:

1. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), what effect does internalised racism have on the marginalised characters portrayed? What are its manifestations?
2. What narrative strategies, both at individual and collective levels, have been utilised by these contemporary authors of children's and young adult literature to help these characters regain and reclaim their sense of self?
3. What is the contribution of CRT to fictional works written specifically for children and young adults?

1.6 Review of Primary Texts

You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question.

—Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1999, p. 28)

In his collection of theoretical essays *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Edward Said (1983) states that the text of all forms should retain a vast web of affiliations with the world, his concept known as the text's *worldliness*. For him, the text, as a “being in the world”, is a “cultural object (...) with a causation, persistence, durability and social presence” (p. 148), or, as suggested by Ashcroft and Ahluwalia (2001), “It has a material presence, a cultural and social history, a political and even an economic being as well as a range of implicit connections to other texts” (p. 20). This worldliness of the text, therefore, as suggested by Said (1983), is central for the meaning making and interpretation

of the reader.

As a cultural object with social, historical, political, cultural and economic dimensions, children's and young adult literature, just like its adult counterpart, has long been regarded as having a strong influence reflecting, both directly and indirectly, societies, cultures and histories (O'Sullivan, 2011). Also, as suggested by Neel Mukherjee, it offers "something away from the self, a vista of a bigger, wider, different world outside [...] its capacity to imagine *the lives of others*" (Mukherjee, 2014, my italics). As early as the eighteenth century when it first came into existence in printed forms, interests, concerns and values of our societies have been echoed in children's literature (Butts, 1992). In her discussion of contemporary comparative children's literature, O'Sullivan (2011) states that children's literature, as "a key field of cultural production that formulates a culture's identity for the following generations, (...) provides young readers with the vocabularies they need to read the world into which they venture" (p. 190), and, like other types of literature and other academic disciplines, it reflects, both directly and indirectly, ideologies as well as certain social and cultural norms of the dominant groups of that particular period (O'Sullivan, 2011; Bradford, 2007; Becker, 1973).

In her juxtaposition of the narratives of literary and nonliterary accounts of children and young adults, Christine Wilkie-Stibbs (2008) suggests that, "the lines of demarcation between the two (fictional and nonfictional texts) are not as quite clearly drawn as one might imagine" (p. 11). On closer look, particularly

with so-called docu-novels, she further suggests that fictional texts have the potential to “evoke readers’ sympathy”, thus making “the fictional child characters (...) more “real” to the reader than the ontologically real child or children that are the subject(s) of government and policy reports” (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2008, p. 12). Given children’s and young adult literature’s affiliation with the world as a cultural object with socio-political, historical, and economic dimensions, as well as the ability to evoke readers’ sympathy, I strongly believe that certain new viewpoints regarding the issue of internalised racism can be attained when explored through the eye of the fictional child.

My decision to make use of African American children’s and young adult literary texts is mainly because of the dearth of research carried out on this topic in critical literary studies, particularly that representing the province of children’s and young adult literature. Also, as the fictional texts selected for this study span almost nine decades of American history and capture racial issues that have been silenced during various historical periods, they are worthy of thorough investigation and are ideal for this study.

Although the focus of this study is on female characters, it needs to be pointed out that this particular racial issue is not strictly a black female experience. For males, such as Forty-seven, a protagonist in Walter Mosley’s (2005) historical novel *47* or a group of male students in Spike Lee’s (1988) *School Daze* or even some of the minor characters in the focus texts, for instance, are also caught in the same web of self-hatred. And the experience, as this study will demonstrate,

is most devastating, particularly for the youngsters who are in the process of becoming, or, as suggested by hooks (1994a), who are “striving to construct positive identity and healthy self-esteem” (p. 211). Yet, whilst both females and males are oppressed by their race, black men, argues Collins (2013), are “privileged by their gender” (p. 14). This, together with the notion of *childhood* or *youth*, the point that I will raise and argue for in Chapter 2, is part of the main reason why the focus of my research is on the female characters, for they have come to represent lived experiences or realities of those who are most powerless, who actually occupy the bottom of social ladder (see more discussion of this topic, particularly its relation to CRT’s *Intersectionality*, in Chapter 2, Section 2.2). However, whilst gender might play a significant role, this study as a whole is attempting to offer transparency that is not muted by this factor.

African American Children’s and young adult literary texts selected for this study include: Tanita S Davis’ (2009) *Mare’s War*, Jacqueline Woodson’s (2007) *Feathers* and her 1994’s *I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This*, Sharon G Flake’s (2005) *Who Am I Without Him* and her 1998’s *The Skin I’m In*, and Sapphire’s (1996) *Push*. Together, these books and their authors have garnered numerous children’s and young adult literary awards, including—among many others—the Coretta Scott King Award (*The Skin I’m In*), the Coretta Scott King Honour Awards (*I Hadn’t meant to Tell You This*, *Mare’s War*, *Who Am I Without Him*), the Newberry Honour Award (*Feathers*), Margaret A. Edwards Award for Lifetime Achievement (*Jacqueline Woodson*), the Black Caucus of the American

Library Association's First Novelist Award (*Push*), ALA-YALSA Best Books for Young Adults (*Who Am I Without Him*, *Mare's War*). From an historical point of view, the books cover almost nine decades of American history, from World War II to the civil rights and black movements to contemporary America. Thematically, they courageously tackle fundamental racial issues affecting the politics of black identities through the life of young protagonists as they struggle toward self-discovery, acceptance and empowerment against a racially prejudiced tide plaguing America today. And these are, as I have discussed in the Introduction, the basis of my selection, not the numerous awards they have garnered. These children's and young adult texts, all through this study, are set against key examples of adult works, particularly Alice Walker's (2004) *The Color Purple*, Toni Morrison's (1999) *The Bluest Eye* and her 1997's *Paradise*. The purpose of my inclusion of these adult texts, however, is not to make a comparative analysis, but to use them as catalysts or pointers for discussion.

As a contemporary African American *Bildungsroman*, or a novel of formation, **Sapphire's (1996) *Push*** tells the story of Precious, an obese, dark-skinned, illiterate 16-year-old girl who is constantly abused by her mother and expelled from school after her second pregnancy by her own father. Whilst most *Bildungsroman* novels typically employ a third person viewpoint (Amoko, 2009), *Push* resorts to the first person, making the novel closer to an autobiography or 'life writing', allowing Precious, therefore, to recount her harsh reality from an authorial position. Through a first-person viewpoint, the novel traces the protagonist's educational, moral, psychological, and social

journey from invisibility to liberation and empowerment. As one of the main themes in *Push* is teens and literacy, a number of studies coming out of education therefore focus on this topic. Although the term literacy covers a wide range of learning experience, most studies conducted, however, focus on reading and writing only (e.g. Lewis, 2011; Stapleton, 2004; Clark & Medina, 2000). As for literary studies, *Push* has been investigated through different angles. Dancu (2010) compares the film version of *Push* with *Boyz n the Hood* using film theories and Cathy Caruth's reading of traumatic experiences as her frameworks; Harkins (2007) and Donaldson (2005) explore the issue of incest and how it has always been a silent/silenced part in the US culture; Michlin (2006) studies the book's oralised narrative using intertextuality or *Signifying* (see further discussion of this topic in Chapter 5 TRIUMPHED) to explain the protagonist's ultimate self-empowerment; and Natov (2006) explores *Push* as one of today's best realistic young adult novels. Though racism is part of an overall investigation of these studies, internalised racism is not part of the discussion, leaving this vital racial issue theoretically void.

Flake's (1998) *The Skin I'm In* narrates the life of Maleeka Madison, a middle school girl burdened with the issue of low self-esteem as a result of having darker skin, and her journey to an ultimate self-acceptance and empowerment. The only critical study done on this book is by Brooks, Browne and Hampton (2008), focusing on the issue of *colourism*, also known as *intra-racial racism*, which refers to discrimination within the black community against those with darker skin and more African features—another issue that will be taken up by

this study, particularly in Chapter 2. Brooks, Browne and Hampton (2008) set up an experiment to find out whether a close reading of *The Skin I'm In* would help adolescent girls in their after-school book club enhance their critical thinking skills and lead to insight on gender and race. While educational in research methodology, the research does provide, through participants' responses, interesting answers regarding *colourism*, though the bigger issue on gender and race is left unsolved. As for Flake's (2005) *Who Am I Without Him*, a collection of short stories depicting the outcomes of twelve unique trysts of young black females in America, there are, to my knowledge, no critical literary studies available to date.

Woodson's (2007) *Feathers* and her 1994's *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This* and **Davis's (2009) *Mare's War*** are the least studied books in the group. *Feathers*, set in the seventies, explores political and social changes and the direct aftermath of desegregated America, particularly towards the life young black pupils at Price School. *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*, set in the nineties, turns its gaze to the issue of child abuse and incest. Both, however, unveil detrimental effects of living in completely segregated towns through the eye of their young characters. One critical study of *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This* by Freedman and Johnson (2000) looks at how teacher self-censorship of literature for early teenagers deprives the students of opportunities to engage in critical discussions of crucial racial issues. *Mare's War*, told in alternating chapters between WW II and present day America, chronicles the life of a young black teenager growing up in the segregated South and later joining the African

American battalion of the Women's Army Corps during WW II, part of American history that is hardly told. Apart from book reviews offered by publishers, newspapers and magazines, there are, to my knowledge, no critical literary studies of *Feathers* and *Mare's War* available to date. However, as both—particularly Jacqueline Woodson—are prolific writers who have extensively explored African American lives in different domestic and public spheres through their child and young adult characters, their books are thus ideal for the present study.

Using CRT as the analytical framework, these six books and their narrative strategies will be critically analysed to seek new messages, viewpoints and positions, as well as to develop a new critical discourse concerning the issue of internalised racism presented in contemporary American children's and young adult literature.

1.7 Chapter Outline

This section provides an overall chapter outline of the thesis. Based on its theoretical frame and research questions, the study is structured as follows.

Chapter 1 *Critical Race Theory and Internalised Racism in Contemporary African American Children's and Young Adult Literature*

This chapter gives a detailed background of the current research project,

which chiefly includes: (i) *Malcolm Is 'LUCKY'*, reviewing relevant literature and providing an overview to the issue currently investigated, together with research justification; (ii) *Slavery and Internalised Racism*, chronicling internalised racism and its historical background, particularly in relation to European imperialism, slavery and racist ideology; (iii) *Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks*, discussing Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its major tenets used in this study; (iv) *Research Questions*, stating, through the lens of CRT, what the study attempts to achieve; (v) *Review of Primary Texts*, introducing and justifying the use of the six children's and young adult texts in the study; and (vi) *Chapter Outline*, providing an overall chapter outline of the thesis.

Chapter 2 *WOUNDED: Internalised Racism and Its Psychological Manifestation*

This chapter, as well as chapters three and four, aims to answer part of the first research question—the damaging effects and manifestations of internalised racism. The emphasis of this chapter is on internalised racism and its psychological manifestation. My argument regarding the literary characters' psychological wounds is primarily premised on or attributed to the detriment of controlling images still ravaging American landscape today. The chapter also takes into account the issue of *intra-racial racism*, also known as *colourism* or *colour caste system*, referring to

racial discrimination within the black community against those with darker skin and more African features. Some of the main CRT tenets used in this chapter include: *The Social Construction of Race, Differential Racialisation, Everyday Racism and Intersectionality*.

Chapter 3 *TONGUE-TIED: Linguistic Violence and Internalised Racism*

This chapter aims to answer part of the first research question. It focuses on the linguistic manifestation of the issue of internalised racism/intra-racial racism portrayed in the focus texts. Utilising CRT's *Social Construction of Race, Differential Racialisation, and Everyday Racism* tenets as my theoretical frame, this chapter turns its gaze to the linguistic aspect of internalised racism, looking at how being made to adhere to the dominant linguistic code leads fictional characters to being not only linguistically crippled but also historically deprived, and the damage is extended to both the self and the black community. Based on Morrison (1998)'s thesis on the importance of fiction and its blend of facts and imagination, the chapter also discusses the significance of the focus texts in making visible inner psychological and linguistic wounds of those haunted by internalised racism in ways that factual evidence alone is perhaps inadequate or less powerful in drawing the reader's belief and sympathy. The texts themselves are also dynamic, complex, multi-layered, offering, through authoritative narrators and authorial voices and viewpoints, realistic accounts of what it is like to be young

and black and female in contemporary America.

Chapter 4 *MISPLACED/DISLOCATED: Political Changes and Internalised Racism*

Through the eye of a fictional child and theoretically supported by CRT's *Interest Convergence*, this chapter delineates what life is like for young American blacks to grow up in a world where formal racist barriers and practices have been made outlawed. It explores the direct aftermath of post-civil rights desegregated America, as well as outlines the new set of challenges and problems facing American blacks, particularly the young and vulnerable, causing them to feel displaced and dislocated. What has been gained on political fronts, as will be discussed in the chapter, cannot eliminate deep-rooted psychological vulnerabilities and insecurities. The triumph, if anything, only gives rise to confusion. The sense of displacement and dislocation discussed in this chapter is theoretically compared to or accentuated by the concepts of 'exile' and 'foreignisation' proposed by Edward Said (2000) and Julia Kristeva (1991), respectively. These two concepts will help give insight into, and highlight what it is like, for the experience of its young characters to be 'home and exiled'. The chapter also discusses America and its obsession with psychology. Through CRT's *Interest Convergence*, it exemplifies that social problems in America tend to be viewed through the lens of psychology instead of politics, resulting in the blame being placed on

victimised individuals as their own psychological defects rather than on structural flaws or racial inequalities.

Chapter 5 *TRIUMPHED: Healing the Wound of Internalised Racism through Counter-Storytelling*

Theoretically driven by CRT's *Counter-Storytelling* and *Voice of Colour* tenets, this chapter encapsulates the benefit of re-authoring one's own story and reality. It delineates, through counter-storytelling, how one can shatter the silence and assert one's own agency, in order to become empowered, liberated and visible. As all the literary texts investigated in this study deal primarily with young characters psychologically mutilated and displaced by internalised racism, the ability to tell their own stories, to become their own translators, in their own black tongue, affords them a chance to begin anew. And as these texts are evidently informed by an autobiographical form of 'Life Writing' or 'Life Stories', they allow these young characters to recount their own realities, as well as determine the course of their own otherness from an authorial position. The chapter also discusses the significance of the focus texts as a set of historical records representing America's 'new collective history', as well as the issue of paradigmatic optimism prevalent in children's and young adult literature.

Chapter 6 *CONCLUSION*

This chapter concludes the study of internalised racism portrayed in contemporary African American children's and young adult literature, and provides key accounts of how CRT, as a theoretical tool, can help explain this racial issue, as well as transform a literary landscape.

CHAPTER 2

WOUNDED: Internalised Racism and Its Psychological Manifestation

2.1 Introduction

There is already a white woman missionary not far from our village who has lived in Africa for the past twenty years. She is said to be much loved by the natives even though she thinks they are an entirely different species from what she calls Europeans (...) She says an African daisy and an English daisy are both flowers, but totally different kinds.

—Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (2004, p. 122)

In a series of letters faithfully delineating her experience in Africa to her long-lost sister Celie, particularly her first encounter with a white woman missionary, Nettie, Alice Walker's (2004) highly intellectual and ambitious female character of *The Color Purple*, unveils Europeans' views of the black others—"An African daisy and an English daisy are both flowers, but totally differently kinds" (p. 122). Not only are they different, as exposed in the above excerpt, but they are also "an entirely different species" (p. 122). 'Difference' here, as previously discussed in Chapter 1, is not a cause for celebration but domination. Whilst the dominant whites permanently occupied the position of 'good', the (black) others got relegated—also permanently—to the realm of 'evil'—"Sin is Negro as virtue is white" (Fanon, 1967, p. 106). And the dominant discourse of the time was ruthlessly yet systematically constructed accordingly, as attested to by Jean-Paul Sartre in his preface to Frantz Fanon's (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*, "The European has only been able to become a man through creating slaves and monsters" (p. 26).

Although the age of imperialism and slavery has ended, its destructive and traumatic effects remain, in various forms, including mental colonisation (Bradford, 2007; McLeod, 2007; Young 2003; hooks, 1994a; 1982; Said, 1993; Wa Thiong'o, 1986; Akbar, 1984; Fanon, 1967). Provided that race and racialisation are socially constructed and shifting in nature and that one's complex identity is formed by various social hierarchies (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Collins, 2009; Tyson, 2006; Crenshaw, 1991), it should come as no surprise that America today is still haunted by the ghost of imperialism and slavery. How a black person's infiltrated self gets divided or mutilated psychologically in contemporary America is certainly a residue of a tragic past, and obviously a methodical upkeep of a racist discourse.

Through a theoretical lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its following four tenets—*The Social Construction of Race*, *Differential Racialisation*, *Everyday Racism* and *Intersectionality*, together with the notion of controlling images, this chapter is aimed at exploring how young fictional characters are psychologically wounded by internalised racism, how the wound gets (mis)directed towards the self and others, and how colour hierarchy divides black communities. These will be read and analysed against three fictional texts written for children and young adults: Sharon G Flake's (2005) *Who Am I Without Him* and her 1998's *The Skin I'm In*, Sapphire's (1996) *Push*—with Alice Walker's (2004) *The Color Purple* and, particularly, Toni Morrison's (1999) *The Bluest Eye* being used as catalysts or pointers for discussion. The four CRT tenets and the three children's and young adult novels above are central to the

analysis of this chapter, as well as Chapter 3, where internalised racism is going to be examined in conjunction with the fictional characters' linguistic (in)abilities.

Following are key 'wounds' included as part of the analysis of this chapter: (i) *Controlling Images, Racist Ideologies and CRT*, discussing wounds, from psychological, political and economic standpoints, brought on by various images circulated in the dominant culture and discourse, as well as providing theoretical positioning; (ii) *Wounds of Internalised Racism: Business-As-Usual*, examining, through young and black female characters from the three chosen children's and young adult novels, fictional representations of self-inflicted, psychologically wounded individuals; (iii) *Intra-Racial Racism: Don't No Niggers Start on Time*, looking at fictional depictions of how victims of internalised racism redirect their own anger towards other members of the same group, causing frictions within the black communities; and (iv) *Final Words*, providing a brief summary of the chapter.

2.2 Controlling Images, Racist Ideologies and CRT

As an independent, strong-minded, uncompromisingly honest black woman who incessantly and defiantly challenges traditional gender roles and boundaries, Shug Avery, Alice Walker's (2004) glamorous fictional character of *The Color Purple*, is unfortunately perceived by both men and women within her own black community as one with poor reputation and of low morals.

Through the black gaze that has already been infiltrated/infected by the 'white is right' ideology, Shug's self-defined identity and her attempt to free herself from such deeply entrenched patriarchal grips have rendered her as a debased image of a "slut, hussy, heifer and streetcleaner" (p. 42), with a "nasty woman disease" (p. 52).

Toni Morrison's (1999) depiction of this 'white is right' infiltration through some of her tragic female characters is also palpable in her celebrated first novel *The Bluest Eye*, as well as her 1977's National Books Critics Award winner *Song of Solomon*. The two books distinctly demonstrate the pernicious effects of rejecting African American roots and blindly embracing white standards of beauty. Claudia MacTeer, the book's narrator in *The Bluest Eye*, resents Maureen Peal, a light-skinned girl her age, for being constantly showered with love and attention from teachers, adults and black boys alike, "We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but lesser" (p. 57), and she cannot help wondering, "What was the secret? What did we lack?" (p. 57). Unlike the book's young protagonist—Pecola Breedlove—who spends long hours "trying to discover the secret of ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised, by teachers and classmates alike" (p. 34) and ultimately accepts without a question a given "cloak of ugliness" (p. 28), Claudia's strong sense of self and identity allows her to see what the secret is, what constitutes that collective admiration, "And all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us" (p. 58, italics in original). Even at an early age, Claudia, as a child character in a

book intended for adult readers (see further discussions of the differences between books written for children and adults in Chapters 4 and 5), is made aware of the fatal effect of that 'Thing' and how it can divide and eventually destroy her black community. Like Pecola Breedlove, Hagar, one of the female characters in Morrison's (1977) *Song of Solomon*, also blindly follows white beauty standards, attributing being rejected by Milkman, her boyfriend, as a direct result of her own African American features: dark skin, big lips and kinky hair. To Milkman, she was his "third beer" (p. 91), not the first or second that one drinks with "almost tearful gratitude [and] pleasure" (p. 91), but the third that one finishes only "because it's there, because it can't hurt and because what difference does it make?" (p. 91). Though his lack of interest angers and humiliates her, the real source of her anger and humiliation seems to stem not from his disrespectful treatments but from a firm belief in her own inferior African features that she physically possesses. Whilst Pecola is ultimately driven to madness by the idealised white beauty, Hagar dies of a 'white' fever, or as suggested by Aoi Mori (1999), "Of the despair brought about by her failure to reproduce herself as a fashionable white woman" (p. 37). Through Pecola and Hagar, Morrison visibly displays the detriment and pervasiveness of the 'white is right' ideology within the black psyches, and how its resultant internalisation has physically and psychologically wounded subjugated individuals.

Disparaging images, or so-called *controlling images* that have long been central to the oppression of American blacks, particularly women, as those depicted in

The Color Purple and *The Bluest Eye* are designed, argues Patricia Hill Collins (2009), “To make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (p. 77). As suggested by Ronald E Hall (2003a) in his discussion of discriminations among the oppressed populations, in order for America to maintain and sustain non-violent domination of the oppressed group, certain mechanisms “must be constructed to denigrate and reinforce a human hierarchy by differentiation” (p. 228), for he thinks the belief in and acceptance of white superiority alone is not enough. One of the mechanisms employed, other than the use of stereotypes and legal barriers, is controlling images (Hall, 2003a).

Both Walker’s (2004) controlling images unfairly thrown at Shug Avery cited above and Morrison’s (1999) portrayal of that fearful ‘Thing’ that makes the “Maureen Peals of the world” (p. 57) beautiful are inextricably linked—one is simply the manifestation of the other. Morrison’s the ‘Thing’, or racist ideology that has infected the black psyches for over a century, as I have discussed in Section 1.3 of Chapter 1, is the reason these controlling images got systematically constructed since the first place. Its later reproductions/constructions only attest to the pervasiveness of racism and racist ideologies in America. As suggested by Collins (2009), “Racist ideologies permeate the [American] social structure to such a degree that they become hegemonic” (p. 7). Such demeaning images constructed in the American collective imagination to humiliate both black men and women as mummies, jezebels, oversexed whores, welfare mothers, rapists, monsters or criminals—

among many others—have been time and again reproduced and circulated in various platforms. For they serve as an effective social control system that helps keep black others in an assigned, subordinate place (Collins, 2009; Tyson, 2006; Hunter, 2005).

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the image of ‘mammy’ resurfaced in 2011 in Washington, D.C. in a form of a middle school performance. Produced by the Bowen McCauley Dance Company and promoted as a tribute to American folk culture traditions, the performance contained a skit dubbed *Little Rabbit, Where’s Your Mammy?* Its controversy instantaneously sparked public debates and resulted in one spectator, Jackie Carter, a well-known stage director in Washington, D.C.’s black theatre scene, being charged with disorderly conduct in a public place (Mohammed, 2012). Enraged by the word ‘*mammy*’, Carter stood up during the performance and booed. She viewed its use as a malicious racial stereotype and an attack on African American women. Such an exploitative term closely associated with slavery that, for over a century, had haunted both the bodies and minds of enslaved black women is not the thing to be taken lightly by most African Americans. As commented by an African American Studies professor at Temple University, “This is nothing more than buffoonery which has as its purpose nothing more grand or sublime, but something mean and detestable” (Mohammed, 2012). In an attempt to defend the school and the dance company, the principal sent out letters to parents on 2nd May 2012, explaining that “The word ‘mammy’ used in the song is a ‘*colloquial affectionate term*’ for mother or grandmother and was used

historically and still today in some areas by both African and White Americans, especially in the south” (Mohammed, 2012, my italics).

The very image invoked by the word ‘mammy’, as provided by bell hooks (1981) in *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, is that of an obese, asexual, faithful and obedient black woman who is willing to serve whites. hooks (1981) states that “whites created in the mammy figure a black woman who embodied solely those characteristics they as colonisers wished to exploit (...) a mother figure who gave all without expectation of return, who not only acknowledged her inferiority to whites but who loved them” (pp. 84-85). Such a degrading female image was deliberately and consciously invented in the dominant discourse by the white majority during the slavery era to economically exploit female house slaves and perpetually put them in the realm of domestic service. The school, however, chose to represent it—one-dimensionally—as an endearing term that “was used historically and still is today” (Mohammed, 2012). Its etymological association with past slavery, however grim and denigrating, was completely ignored. It would be ungrounded and perhaps unfair, however, to accuse the school of any racial discrimination or of intentionally dehistoricising black history. What the controversial mammy skit above discloses, I believe, is how these controlling images and racist ideologies, through state apparatuses like educational institutions and the media, have been firmly embedded in the American landscape to such a degree that they appear ordinary or become hegemonic. And their ordinariness, as put forward by critical race theorists, is what makes

racism remain rampant in America today (Delgado and Stefancic, 2013; 2012), making it nearly impossible for the subjugated individuals to escape (Collins, 2009). It is therefore not a surprise to see such a statement being issued by the principal of Kenmore Middle School.

As stated in the first chapter, controlling images and racist ideologies, like CRT's *Social Construction of Race* and *Differential Racialisation*, are socially constructed and manipulated. Their social construction also gets shifted, at different times, to serve the perceived needs of the dominant group (Collins, 2009; Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Historically, they were systematically employed, particularly during the slavery era, to keep black people in place and maintain social order and control. Black men were depicted as lustful, sexual beasts and a potential threat to white power to justify lynching, such as the representation of 'Mr' in Walker's (2004) *The Color Purple* or Precious's father in Sapphire's (1996) *Push*; black women as oversexed whores to validate sexual violence committed to them (Hunter, 2005; Peach, 2000). Since black women were constantly depicted in the dominant discourse as ones who would never refuse sex, states Hunter (2005), "[They] therefore cannot be raped" (p. 33). Presently, as resources are scarce and job competitions are high, African Americans are painted in the collective imagination as lazy, violent and threatening (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Bernard, 2011; Tyson, 2006; Hall, 2003b), or, as acknowledged by the US President regarding the most recent shooting of Michael Brown, an eighteen-year-old African American, by a white police officer in Missouri, "In too many communities around this country young

men of color are left behind and seen as objects of fear” (Carroll, Swaine, McGreal, 2014). A recent racially coded remark given by a senior US Republican Paul Ryan regarding African American men, particularly those living in inner cities, is demonstrative of this racial phenomenon, “We have got this tailspin of culture (...) of men not working and just generations of men not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work” (BBC, 2014)

Whilst literary characters such as Shug Avery in Walker’s (2004) *The Color Purple* or Claudia MacTeer in Morrison’s (1999) *The Bluest Eye* have been set up to challenge such socially constructed notions with their own self-definitions, others, like Pecola Breedlove of *The Bluest Eye* and Hagar of *Song of Solomon*, as well as young female protagonists from the focus texts, internalise their detrimental effects and come to perceive themselves through the white gaze, “The distaste must be for her (Pecola), her blackness (...) And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes” (Morrison, 1999, p. 37). This internalisation or inculcation of such images, stereotypes and ideologies results in both individual and collective wounds, and its scar can be physically and psychologically devastating, particularly for the youngsters who are struggling to form their own identity and self-esteem (Cokley, 2002; hooks, 1994a).

Whilst the wound of internalised racism has ravaged generation after generation of African Americans, its destructive impacts towards the lives of black men and women are greatly different. Through the lens of CRT,

particularly its *Intersectionality* tenet, it is apparent that various social hierarchies, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation are at play and intersecting when it comes to the lived experiences of black men and women (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Collins, 2009; Tyson, 2006; Crenshaw, 1991). In her article discussing identity politics of battered women through CRT's *Intersectionality*, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) argues that black men and black women experience racism and sexism differently. However, when it comes to blacks' politics of identity, intragroup differences and complexities often get conflated, trivialised, oversimplified or ignored, resulting in black women being pushed to the bottom of the social ladder (Crenshaw, 1991). In order to understand and deal properly with the problems facing women of colour, therefore, it is essential that *Intersectionality* becomes part of the analysis, that it is part of the social landscape. For without which, any well-intended efforts that are meant to tackle racial issues might appear fruitless.

Though both black men and black women are discriminated against for their blackness, men's self-worth and upward mobility do not rely so much on their physical traits or attractiveness (Collins, 2013; 2009; Hunter, 2006; Mori 1999). This very idea of attaching one's self-worth to physical beauty also echoes W E B Du Bois's (1969) words written almost a century ago but still ring true today. In one of his well-known essays exploring black women's economic independence and motherhood "The Damnation of Women", Du Bois (1969) reflects the way the concept of beauty is partially embraced by the patriarchal world, how it harshly judges one and spares the other, putting (black) women

through the male gaze, unfairly asking, without beauty, “What else are women for?” (p. 182). As a matter of fact, since the slavery era, black women have seen themselves being assigned to the bottom of social ladder, relentlessly exploited by both white and black worlds. Whilst the black male slave was only taken advantage of in the fields as a labourer, “The black female slave was exploited as a laborer in the fields, a worker in the domestic household, a breeder, and as an object of white male sexual assault” (hooks, 1981; p. 22).

Also, in her discussion of the concept of beauty among African Americans, Margaret Hunter (2005) points out that “while women of color are busy trying to be lighter and feeling resentful toward one another, black men maintain their status as full subjects” (p. 91). Hunter (2005) goes on to say that “dark-skinned men are often considered more virile, dangerous, sexy, and strong” (p. 119). As a matter of fact, through racist ideologies and white imagination, dark skin is perceived as masculine and thus enhances male’s power (Hunter, 2005; Hill, 2002; hooks, 1994a; West, 1993a). Black men are also not as strongly objectified by racism as black women because their valuations are not dictated by their physical beauty, thus “they are free from the feminized standard of white aesthetics” (Mori, 1999, p. 62). When associated with women, however, blackness erases or devalues their femininity. Black women’s valuations, therefore, have been and will continue to be dictated by the white standards, embracing long straight hair, light(er) skin as a true definition of beauty and desirability (Peach, 2000; hooks, 1994a; Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992), or what Hunter (2005) calls ‘the beauty queue’, where those belonging to the front

of the queue are the whitest or lightest—the most beautiful. As also highlighted by Cornel West (1993a) in his discussion of various taboos surrounding black sexuality, “The ideal of female beauty in this country puts a premium on lightness and softness mythically associated with white women and downplays the rich stylistic manners associated with black women” (p. 90). The findings from an empirical study conducted by Mark E Hill (2002) on skin colour and the perception of attractiveness among African Americans also support the above claims, suggesting that skin tone plays more vital a role in women than in men. Hill’s (2002) findings imply that “the social and psychological penalties tied to dark skin are substantially greater for women than for men” (p. 88). Therefore, those who were born dark, as commented by hooks (1994a), are “to start life handicapped, with a serious disadvantage” (p. 204), because black, as rightly put by Featherstone (1994), is “the most un-American color of all” (iii), as will be illustrated by authors of children’s and young adult texts chosen for this study.

As also pointed out by hooks (1994a), various controlling images of black women circulated in the media today, such as welfare mothers, black bitches, all-purpose whores, etc., are marked only by darker skin, “No light skin occupies this devalued position” (p. 209). Spike Lee’s (1988) musical-drama *School Daze* and his 1991’s *Jungle Fever*, which explore how skin colour has invaded a school campus and an interracial relationship, respectively, and Kiri Davis’s (2007) short documentary examining the importance of colour, hair and facial features of young African American *A Girl Like Me* are good examples of such

representations and phenomena. As a result, numerous conflicts regarding skin colour, including this study's focused issue, internalised racism, always hit hardest on the lives of black women, especially the young ones, as visibly noticeable in Morrison's (1999) *The Bluest Eye* and all children's and young adult novels selected for this study. And this is another key reason why the focus of my research is on the female characters (see more discussion on the use of female characters in Chapter 1, Section 1.6).

Through young black female characters from the three chosen novels—Flake's (2005) *Who Am I Without Him* and her 1998's *The Skin I'm In* and Sapphire's (1996) *Push*—the following section details how the wound of internalised racism has injured these young characters, turning them against the self, as well as dividing black communities. The three novels will be read and analysed in conjunction with these four CRT tenets: *The Social Construction of Race*, *Differential Racialization*, *Intersectionality* and *Everyday Racism*.

2.3 Wounds of Internalised Racism: Business-As-Usual

From a CRT standpoint, how African Americans have been racialised, stigmatised and negatively portrayed in the dominant discourse through controlling images and racist ideologies depends largely on the needs of the mainstream white America (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Its purpose has been mainly to keep African Americans in their subordinate position. This racialisation of African Americans through the use of controlling images and

racist ideologies resonates the fact that racism, as put forward by critical race theorists, is “normal, (...) an ingrained feature of our landscape” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2013, p. 2), unconsciously motivated, and an integral part of everyday life and of American culture (Bell, 2005; Collins, 2009; Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Lawrence, 1987). How deeply entrenched this ordinariness of racism has been in the American landscape is also fittingly captured by Morrison (1999, p. 164) at the conclusion of *The Bluest Eye*, through her child narrator Claudia MacTeer:

I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds this year. This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live.

Through her narrator’s voice shown in the excerpt above, Morrison (1999) reflects how a racist, sexist society can destroy some of its innocent daughters; how some African Americans, plagued by hegemonic ideologies, will always find American soil an hostile place. When the land is ‘bad’ for its inhabitants, instead of ‘working’ the land through available state apparatuses (e.g. educational institutions, media, laws, etc.) or implementing new ‘working’ mechanisms that would ‘look to the bottom’ (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Matsuda, 1987), the seed of blame, unfortunately, is planted on the victims, ultimately driving them to madness or destruction, like her female protagonist Pecola Breedlove.

In her discussion of the image of the welfare mother, one of the controlling images that has, for decades, devastated African-American women for being lazy and economically dependent, feeding off others, Patricia Hill Collins (2009)

argues that its creation in the dominant discourse “shifts the angle of vision away from structural sources of poverty and blames the victims themselves” (p. 87), providing justification for the dominant group to limit state entitlements for poor black mothers without actually looking at the root cause of the problem. And today, with the presence of the first African American President in the White House, together with Affirmative Action and colour blindness of constitutional law, the white ruling class, particularly the conservatives, prefer to paint the American landscape as a ‘post-racial’ society, a land of equal opportunity with fair treatment for all, consequently insisting that “it is time for blacks and other minorities to stop complaining and roll up their sleeves like anyone else” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 30). If discrimination is not there, any remedy is thus deemed unnecessary. As echoed by Charles Lawrence (1987) in his ground breaking article on “Unconscious Racism” a few decades ago, which still rings true today, “If blacks are being treated fairly yet remain at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, only their own inferiority can explain their subordinate position” (p. 325).

This only is evidence that racism in America is still thriving, though it operates on the sly to avoid legal prosecution (Tyson, 2006). And the law, unfortunately, can remedy only the overt cases of racism and other forms of social injustice, it can do very little for the covert ones, particularly everyday racism, that black minorities have to encounter on a daily basis. Common and daily experiences that can leave black people emotionally drained include—among many others—being watched or followed in stores by security personnel, being

ignored while waiting in line or being patronised and talked down by white folks. White majorities keeping a physical distance from a person of colour or avoiding touch or so-called contact avoidance (Essed, 2002) is also part of this anguish experienced and endured daily by American blacks. And this 'business-as-usual' form of daily racism is most stressful and emotionally draining, resulting in ones' feelings of inferiority, desolation, alienation, dislocation and, for the unfortunate some—self-hatred (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; 2000; Tyson, 2006; Burstow, 2003; Essed, 2002; and Harrell, 2000). How racism is internalised, triggering victimized individuals' negative and psychologically devastating feelings, as discussed in Chapter 1, is a direct result of being exposed and acculturated to the racist ideology perpetuated by the dominant group (Hipolito-Delgado, 2010; Pyke, 2010; Tyson, 2006; Poupart, 2003; Fortes de Leff, 2002; Baker, 1983). And when victimised individuals have been socially and psychologically programmed to view themselves through the white gaze, the images seen are therefore distorted, ugly, inferior. These images are aptly portrayed in Sapphire's (1996) *Push*, Flake's (2005) *Who Am I Without Him* and her 1998's *The Skin I'm In*. These three contemporary children's and young adult novels compellingly depict the plight of three young African American girls psychologically wounded by racialised America.

Set in Harlem in the 1980's and told through a brutally honest, linguistically crude first-person narrative, Sapphire's (1996) *Push* recounts the story of Claireece Precious Jones, or better known in the novel as Precious, an obese, illiterate and dark-skinned 16-year-old girl who lives with her abusive mother,

and a father who has repeatedly raped her, causing both of her pregnancies, and resulting in her being expelled from I.S. 146, a school she currently attends. As the school has decided to send her to an alternative school Each One Teach One because she is pregnant, Precious is furious, and her fury can be attributed to the way she has relentlessly been undermined or dismissed by school authorities—"Sixteen is ahh rather ahh *old* to still be in junior high school" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 7, my italics). As I have stated in the discussion of CRT's *Everyday Racism* in Chapter 1, part of the victims' psychological devastation results from being made inferior, less capable or intelligent by an authority or state official. Time and again throughout the first half of the story, Precious has been reminded by those in power that she does not belong in any school, "I always did like school, jus' seem school never did like me" (p. 36), "'N I really do want to learn. Everyday I tell myself something gonna happen, some shit like on TV. (...) But again, it has not been that day" (p. 5). The reason Precious has come to loathe herself for being "so stupid, so ugly, worth nuffin" (p. 34), which also echoes Celie's sense of self-loathing in Walker's (2004) *The Color Purple* (see further discussion of these two characters in Chapter 5, particularly in relation to the notion of '*Signifying*'), can be ascribed to the way she has been incessantly underestimated by her schoolteachers who have never failed to assert their authorities towards students like her, "Finally Principal say, Let it be. Be glad thas all the trouble she give you. Focus on the ones who *can* learn, Principal say to teacher" (p. 37). The act of 'wetting' herself in class—*thas all the trouble she give you*—gets preposterously linked to her learning (dis)abilities. The real reasons she commits such an act—getting picked on, laughed at and tormented

by peers for being big-fat-and-ugly, being talked down by her own teachers—are considered irrelevant, undeserving any further investigation. The fact that she, a black girl, ‘did it’ is enough for school authorities to assign to such an act negative racial interpretations. Being dismissed and alienated by both teachers and peers, Precious feels physically and psychologically paralysed, “I just sit there, it’s like I paralyze or some shit” (p. 36), believing that she is “one of the ones who can’t” (p. 37), who should be left behind.

Schools and authorities involved also utilise various means to keep students like Precious ‘behind’, one of which is done through school testing. Tests, for Precious, are “nuffin’ new (...) The tesses paint a picture of me wif no brain. The tesses paint a picture of me an’ my muver—my whole family, we more than dumb, we invisible” (p. 30). Precious’s perception of such educational means is nothing but another way for ‘them’ to magnify and re-inscribe her own dumbness and invisibility, which, from her own observation, have already been assumed by school authorities (see further discussion of school testing and its relation to linguistic violence and dehistoricisation in Chapter 3). This kind of unfounded assumption, as pointed out by Philomena Essed (2002), is extremely destructive, for it can lead to the teacher’s “ignoring or lacking enthusiasm for the achievements of black students” (p. 207).

Later in *Push*, whilst trying to reclaim her own life through literacy, Precious, once again, gets to glimpse into the reality of being constantly defined by others. Through her social worker’s report (that is not meant for her to see), Precious

discovers how her whole existence has been summed up in a few harsh words by the state official, “Obvious intellectual limitations” (p. 119). Ms Weiss (White), her social worker, clearly asserts her authority through the power of language, turning Precious into an object that needs to be thoroughly defined, and all the while keeping herself at a distance as an objective observer—“I have just finished a session with Claireece Precious Jones. (...) She seems to be actively engaged in all aspects of the learning process. However, her TABE test scores are disappointingly low (...) Abdul is the client’s second child; (...) Despite her *obvious intellectual limitations*, she is quite capable of working as a *home attendant*” (pp. 117-119, my italics). As acknowledged by Roland Barthes (1981) in his discussion of the theory of the text, the reason certain power in the society is unassailable is because “the object in which it is carried for all human eternity is language” (p. 459), and language is always a vital part of the power structures that form or define our social reality (Barthes, 1981). When employed by state officials to define minorities’ reality, its effect is, therefore, fatal. All through the report, not only is the social worker’s language extremely formal, keeping Precious and her friend Jermaine confused and furious all the way through, it is also heavily coded with racist ideologies to such a degree that Precious’s whole life is boiled down to almost nothingness, a failure, and the only place left for her, according to Ms Weiss’s report, is “working as a home attendant”. Through the power of language, Ms Weiss reawakens and reproduces the mammy image, officially pushing Precious back to her subordinate position, and with that, Precious’s attempt at self-definition through literacy is compromised.

How one's self-definition is being compromised or translated by the dominant others has been captured by both works of fiction and nonfiction, of various means. In a seven-minute, Diversity Award winning documentary called *A Girl Like Me*, Kira Davis (2007), a seventeen-year-old African American director, through her peers' interviews regarding black features and the society's standards of beauty, brings forth compelling stories of mentally wounded girls lost in racialised America. Like fictional characters from the focus texts, Jennifer, an eighteen-year-old participant, gives a heart-breaking account of what it is like to be young and black (and female) in contemporary America:

I feel like we're busy searching for it [culture, morals, values] while everybody else in the society is throwing their ideas of what they believe we should be at us, but you know, personally, we know that's not what we should be, but we're gonna take it because we don't know exactly what it is that we should be.

It is essential, therefore, for black women intellectuals, argues Collins (2009), to push forward the idea of self-definition, for "speaking for oneself and crafting one's own agenda" (p. 40) is key to black women's empowerment and survival. As eloquently worded by one of the greatest African American writers Ralph Ellison (1964) in his critical essay critiquing twenty-century American fiction and its treatment of the black others, "A people must define itself, and minorities have the responsibility of having their ideals and images recognized as part of the composite image" (p. 99). For, warns Audre Lorde (1984) in *Sister Outsider*, "If we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others—for their use and to our detriment" (p. 45).

Whilst Precious is continually undermined by the authorities, Maleeka Madison, a 13-year-old female protagonist of Flake's (1998) *The Skin I'm In* has come to learn the hard truth inscribed on the other side of the same coin—school authorities having no expectations of poor, underprivileged students. Winner of the 1999 Coretta Scott King Award for new authors and told also from the first-person point of view, *The Skin I'm In* depicts the story of seventh grader Maleeka Madison, a girl burdened with the low self-esteem as a result of her dark skin and African features—"Somebody said I had hair so nappy I needed a rake to comb it" (p. 13). This feeling of inferiority brought on by her skin colour, unfortunately, robs her of a better educational opportunity at Central Middle School, "I just froze, I guess. The school is so big. So clean. So fancy. And them girls...they looked like they come out of a magazine. Long, straight hair. Skin the color of potato chips and cashews and Mary Jane candies. No Almond Joy-colored girls like me" (p. 39). Having to attend McClenton Middle School, an inner city school, and working in the principal's office as a punishment for getting into a fight, Maleeka witnesses, first-hand, teachers' perceptions of students at her school. Feeling threatened by (or perhaps jealous of) the new teacher Miss Saunders, a new African American temporary teacher who is determined to change inner city kids' lives through literacy and better education, permanent teaching staff resort to old clichés to resist any change that might be materialised, employing racially biased discourse ubiquitously encoded in the society through racist ideologies, "If you ask me, that program doesn't work one bit. A school doesn't run like a corporation (...) Change takes time" (p. 36). Miss Saunders, the one fostering change, is perceived as "a bull in

a China shop" (p. 36), as "she's pushing the kids too hard. Telling them to read fifty pages one night, thirty the next" (p. 36). Encouraging these underprivileged kids to live up to their full potential, unfortunately, is considered 'pushing too hard'. Miss Saunders should have followed the curriculum "the way it's laid out" (p. 36). Whereas all those "tesses" in *Push* paint the picture of Precious as dumb and invisible, the way the curriculum is being laid out in *The Skin I'm In* certainly reaffirms these kids' unspoken dumbness and invisibility. Listening in on grownups' conversations from under the desk, Maleeka has come to realise what is expected of them, or rather—what is NOT or NEVER expected of them! When finally realising that a black girl is in on their supposedly (white) grownup conversation, Mr Mac "gets all red-faced" (p. 36), and feels no shame but anger, suddenly unleashing the old familiar, "My, my, Makeeka, aren't you the lucky one? Here to work in the office, I see" (p. 36). While *Push's* protagonist, Precious, is being pushed back to her assigned position—working as a home attendant—by her social worker Ms Weiss, Maleeka's place in the principal's office is considered beyond expectation—*Aren't you the lucky one?* Both, according to the authorities' views, should occupy their lowly subjugated positions as painted by the test or laid out by the curriculum.

To have one's own reality perpetually defined and undermined by others, as depicted by Sapphire (1996) and Flake (1998) through their aforementioned young female characters, can lead to one's emulation and internalisation of such prevalent racist and hegemonic ideologies. Throughout her young life, Precious has constantly been put under the deriding white gaze, until she too has come

to view her own image through its distorted, racially-biased lens, thus her ensuing self-loathing is made inevitable, “I look Mama and see my face, my body, my color—we bofe big, dark. *Am I ugly?*” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 84, italics in original). Through her peers’ ruthless and incessant taunts, compounded by the feeling of inferiority or being ‘less’ made officially visible by school and state authorities, the answer to her ‘ugliness’ is everywhere to be found, “Claireece is so ugly she laffing ugly. (...) No, that fat bitch is crying ugly” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 12). Through these racialising and dehumanising calls, as suggested by Fanon (1967), one can be stripped of his/her subjectivity and thereby turned into an object “in the midst of other objects” (p. 82), resulting in a phenomenon known as “two dimensions” (p. 8), causing one to be ‘self-divided’, “A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro” (p. 8). This is also what Du Bois (1989) describes as double consciousness, which refers to the act of “looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p. 3). For these two social critics, the very act of judging oneself through the eyes of others, of living in two incompatible cultures, can give rise to one’s total psychological destruction (Du Bois, 1989; Fanon, 1967). In his discussion of the taboo surrounding black sexuality and the need for it to be demythologised, Cornel West (1993a) also points out that a big part of self-hatred and self-contempt among African Americans stems from the way white supremacist ideology is methodically constructed and sustained in the black psyches. The reason American blacks are psychologically wounded, argues West (1993a), is because they are convinced that “their bodies are ugly, their intellect is inherently

underdeveloped” (p. 85). Ultimately and inexorably, Precious has succumbed to the white gaze’s deleterious effect, allowing her own black vision to be infiltrated, her reality defined and devalued, “I feel so stupid sometimes. So ugly, worth nuffin” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 34). And with such, comes the feeling of shame.

Not only does Precious, through her own polluted black gaze, allow shame to invade her personal space, she also lets it destroy her nest of mental security, “Don’t nobody need me. I know who I am. I know who they say I am—vampire sucking the system’s blood. Ugly black grease to be wipe away, punish, kilt, changed, finded a job for” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 31). Subsequently, her reality is reduced to a burden of the imposing system, a bloodsucking vampire that needs to be terminated. Through her narrator’s use of the vampire image, the author Sapphire invokes one of today’s permeating controlling images systematically employed and circulated in the dominant discourse—the welfare mother. Its use, as suggested by Collins (2009), is to tarnish poor African American mothers for being economically dependent, leeching off the system’s benefits, without dealing with the actual cause of the poverty that, for decades, has ravaged the livelihood of underprivileged blacks and other ethnic minorities. When resources are in short supply and getting a job has become more and more competitive, assert critical race theorists Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2012), it comes as no surprise that African Americans get depicted in the dominant discourse as lazy and threatening, as reflected in the poisoned mind of Sapphire’s (1996) literary character Precious—*punish, kilt, changed, finded a*

job for! This is also evident, they further add, that the welfare mother image, like the shifting nature of race and racialisation, is socially fabricated at different times to serve the dominant group's needs (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). This type of rhetoric—blaming the victims, argues Collins (2009), only provides grounds for the dominant group to take no responsibility for structural failures (see more discussion of structural flaws in Chapter 4); and its utilisation, she further asserts, proves once again how hegemonic racist ideologies have been in America.

When explored through CRT's notion of *Intersectionality*, the plight of these fictional characters yields another compelling, (less ambivalent) angle of analysis and interpretation. The concept of race, as I have stated in Chapter 1, intersects with other factors in forming one's complex identity, such as sex, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and socioeconomic backgrounds. When the marginalised, such as Precious and Maleeka, occupy more than one category, multiple forms of oppression, therefore, can inevitably be felt. These young characters' sense of self-loathing, as well as their being displaced, dehistoricised and linguistically violated (see detailed discussions of linguistic violence and the sense of displacement in relation to internalised racism in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively), clearly does not stem only from their being black but also female, exacerbated by their poverty, plus, in case of Precious—obesity and illiteracy. It is all these factors combined that have aggravated or contributed to their self-hatred.

Whilst *Intersectionality* is often praised for its embrace of intragroup ‘differences’, of taking into account in its analysis various aspects of one’s complex identity, as I have stated in Chapter 1 under the discussion of CRT’s major tenets, what is missing in its theoretical premises is the lack of or inadequate attention given to the life of those labelled by the adult world and institutions as ‘immature and inexperienced’. Perhaps another category or criterion, which is as equally important as the existing ones, that should be added to CRT’s *Intersectionality*, for a more thorough analysis, particularly in this study, is the notion of *childhood* or *youth*. Being young and vulnerable, African American children and young adults are more likely and easily to be influenced and harmed by images, values and norms sanctioned by the dominant group, at the expense of their own erasure. In her discussion of narratives regarding the prescribed normativity and the erasure of the child and young adult bodies, Christine Wilkie-Stibbs (2008) defines childhood as “the systematically differentiated position of disorder” (p. 52), and that children’s “opportunities to occupy positions of power in the systems of knowledge (...) are delimited by their temporal immaturity and inexperience” (p. 52). It is evidenced and well-documented, as she further points out, that children’s ability to assert their own agency is achieved only through their proper subscription “to the modes of specification and institutional structurings that dictate and proscribe their embodied childly behavior” (p. 52). Due to their ‘temporal immaturity and inexperience’ and their ‘absence of agency’, together with the fact that these are individuals whose characters are being formed or who are in the process of becoming, children and young adults are therefore

placed at a disadvantaged position. And if those particular children or young adults are female and *black*, that leaves them almost no place to be—*Ugly black grease to be wipe away, punish, kilt*. In the attempt to capture her own fantasy into words, *Push*'s protagonist provides a startling account of her vulnerable position, "Boyz overlook a lot to be wif a white girl or yellow girl, especially if it's a boy that's dark skin wif big lips or nose, he will go APE over yellow girl. So that's my first fantasy, is get light" (Sapphire, 1996, pp. 113-114). This supports earlier comments that black men's or even, in this case, boys' self-worth are not judged or objectified by beauty standards; consequently, they are placed at a better position than that occupied by girls or women, or, as rightly put by Collins (2013), although both are oppressed by their race, black men are "privileged by their gender" (p. 14). Being obese, illiterate, female, young and, above all—black, Precious, as well as other female characters included in this study, sees no place for her loathsome self. Mentally morphing herself into a white creature, therefore, is her only alternative—"I was like a white girl, a *real* person, inside" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 32). By making *childhood* or *youth* part of its theoretical and analytical frame, I believe CRT's *Intersectionality* is strengthened and more practical than its existing theoretical stance in approaching different groups of people without conflating or oversimplifying their realities or experiences. When things are examined from the perspective of individual agents or what Delgado and Stefancic (2012) refer to as *perspectivism*, any attempt, be it theoretical or practical, to understand the plight of intersectional individuals is made plausible.

Not only do victims of internalised racism experience self-loathing as a result of their own perceived inferiority, they also wish, often, that they were white or looked more white (Pyke, 2010; Tyson, 2006; Baker, 1983). Whilst Pecola Breedlove, *The Bluest Eye's* tragic protagonist, attempts to gain others' approval and love through possessing a pair of blue eyes, "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes" (Morrison, 1999, p. 34), Precious Jones of *Push* and Maleeka Madison of *The Skin I'm In* resort to acquiring, or rather—dreaming of having—light(er) skin. Precious describes white people she sees in the picture as "the real people's (...) they are pritty people, girls with little titties like buttons and legs like long white straws" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 31). And she wonders, "Do all white people look like pictures? No, 'cause the white people at school is fat and cruel like evil witches from fairy tales but they *exist*. Is it because they white?" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 31). Maleeka Madison, being incessantly made ashamed of her own dark skin, longs for white features like those of her friend Malcolm, "Malcolm is fine. He's got long, straight hair. Skin the color of a butterscotch milkshake. (...) He's half and half—got a white dad and a black momma. He's lucky. He looks more like his dad than his mom" (Flake, 1998, p. 17). In *I Like White Boys*, one of the short stories collected in *Who Am I Without Him*, a collection of short stories exploring love, loss and the first glimpse of the politics of identity experienced by African American teenagers, the writer Sharon G Flake (2005) revisits the very same concept through another young female character Erika, an African American who is perpetually infatuated with anything 'white'—"A black girl on the outside, and a Wendy-white girl on the inside" (p. 109), as her friends call

her. Like Maleeka, Erika idolises whiteness: “Johnny reminds me of my cousin—his father is black and Jewish, and his mother is Swedish” (p. 112); “Ever since I was five, I’ve liked boys that look like Johnny better than the ones that look like me” (p. 101). For these young literary characters, unfortunately, beauty is delimited and occupied only by those with white or lighter skin. When asked by Ms Rain, her African American teacher at Each One Teach One, to capture her fantasy into words, Precious Jones, *Push*’s protagonist, immediately conjures up an image of herself as a light skinned girl, “I tell you one thing right now, I would be light skinned, thereby treated right and loved by boyz. (...) So that’s my first fantasy, is get light” (Sapphire, 1996, pp. 113-14).

Being psychologically enslaved by this racial malady, these young literary characters, unfortunately, equate socially fabricated beauty with love and happiness. Faulting their misperception, thus, seems futile, as they have, at such a young age, been let down by the society and left to fend for themselves in a nation filled with *raped children*, *crack addicts* and *vampires* sucking the system’s blood (Sapphire, 1996), amidst an hostile land that is “bad for certain kinds of flowers” (Morrison, 1999, p. 164). As their worldview has been wholly soiled by racist ideologies, these young black female characters ultimately let their own realities and definitions be buried and defined by the dominant white standards. As suggested by Patrice Cormier-Hamilton (1994), “By subscribing to a false white standard of beauty, African Americans assist the repressive efforts of the majority culture and bury their identities, following an unhealthy path of self-hatred rather than self-love” (p. 116). In *Black Women Novelists: The*

Development of a Tradition, Barbara Christian (1980) discusses some tragic consequences of having one's culture incongruously imposed by another culture, or what she calls the inversion of truth, materialising primarily out of the inefficacy of the culture to separate 'image from substance'. When such a tragic cultural imposition takes place, as also echoed by a Zimbabwean novelist Tsitsi Dangarembga (1988) in her autobiographical first novel *Nervous Conditions*, culturally confused individuals, like her young narrator Tambudzai, are put in a 'nervous condition' and, for some, end up emulating the dominant culture at the expense of their own cultural and psychological obliteration. For those unfortunate some, states Christian (1980), "self-hatred" (p. 177) is the price that they have to pay.

Mentally wounded and socially let down, young and black Pecola, Precious, Maleeka and Erika help unmask the 'hidden injuries of race'. Deep psychological scars that these literary characters inflict upon their polluted, white-infiltrated selves demonstrate the detrimental effects of internalising racist ideologies, of rejecting African American roots and blindly embracing white standards of beauty, and of having their own realities devalued and ultimately destroyed. Wounds of internalised racism are deadly, capable of leaving the victims psychologically incapacitated. Not only could they turn one against the self, as captured by the literary characters above, they could also divide and cause frictions within one's community, as shall be discussed in the following section.

2.4 Intra-Racial Racism: Don't No Niggers Start on Time

Did *bad* mean *Black*? The endless scrubbing with lemon juice in the cracks and crevices of my ripening, darkening, body. And oh, the sins of my dark elbows and knees, my gums and nipples, the folds of my neck and the cave of my armpits!

—Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (1984, p. 149, italics in original)

In “Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger”, one of the essays included in *Sister Outsider*, young Audre Lorde (1984) naively asked, “Did *bad* mean *Black*?” (p. 149, italics in original). Being born darker than the other two sisters, “They were good-looking, I was dark” (p. 149), derided by the white world at such an early age as being ‘simple’, and constantly reminded by her own mother as a ‘devil’ child, the young Lorde came to equate *bad* with *Black*. And when her surroundings—“Newspapers and movies and holy pictures and comic books and Amos ‘n Andy radio programs” (p. 147)—were coated with this affliction, her initial view and questioning—Did *bad* mean *Black*?—was substantiated. Being young and vulnerable and black, she had “no tools to dissect it, no language to name it” (p. 147), and yet, like most black children in America, could not avoid being affected and devastated by it. Having lived in a nation filled with “entrenched loathing and contempt for whatever is Black and female” (p. 151), eventually and inevitably, seeds of ‘anger’ and ‘hatred’ begin to take root. And it matters not if her linguistic faculty is endowed with grown-up vocabularies to name and identify what is scarring her. *It* is there, and she has nowhere to hide—“That’s right, you better run, you ugly yaller bitch!” (p. 149).

“Anger”, says Lorde, “does not destroy” (p. 152). She further adds—plainly, truthfully—“Hatred does” (p. 152). And when hatred is internalised and

directed upon the self as a result of being exposed to the hostile environment, the effects are life-threatening, leaving one with deep, enduring psychological scars. Through their literary beings, both children's and adult authors cited above demonstrate the type of wounds one is capable of inflicting on oneself—"I wanna die I hate myself HATE myself" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 39). When racism is internalised, however, its target is not only the self. The black 'others', unfortunately, also get engulfed in its fury.

Internalised racism, as stated by Collins (2009), Tyson (2006), hooks (1994a), and Russell, Wilson, and Hall (1992), can lead one to act against each other, known as *intra-racial racism*, or *colourism* or *colour caste system*, referring to racial discrimination within the black community against those with darker skin and more African features. Its root, as previously discussed in Chapter 1, Sections 1.2 and 1.3, can be traced back to the slavery era, to the system of colour hierarchy, which tended to privilege lighter-skinned blacks over their darker-skinned counterparts. These lighter-skinned blacks, or the mulattoes, the products of miscegenation, were served as a buffer class between whites and blacks, as their presence—being offspring of and physically approximating whites—reduced racial tensions (Hunter, 2005; Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992; hooks, 1982). As a result, special privileges and status were often reserved for this group, as most whites believed that mulattoes were more intelligent and capable, visibly creating frictions within the black community (Hunter, 2005; Stevenson, 1996; Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992; Frazier, 1951). And as these light-skinned blacks started running their own businesses and taking up

leadership positions, white blood was therefore (mis)interpreted as the main ingredient for any human success, suggesting, perversely, a direct relationship between one's ancestry and intelligence (Hunter, 2005).

The years 1865 and 1954 marked critical historical moments in the United States—the former saw centuries of slavery permanently abolished, the latter an overturn of the 'separate but equal' policy that had haunted African American psyches, particularly those of the young ones, since 1896 (see further discussions of political changes in America and their effects towards the young characters' sense of displacement in Chapter 4). Legal victories of these grand historical moments, like gaining independence of former colonised countries, however, ended only physical, visible forms of servitude and segregation. Social, economic, and cultural realities of today's African Americans are still shaped and haunted by the ghost of slavery. As commented by Edward W Said (1993) in *Culture and Imperialism*, although the establishment of the empires has ended, imperialism "lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices" (p. 8), or so-called neocolonialism (Nkrumah, 1965). Postcolonial status, argues Robert J C Young (2003), only symbolises or represents "a shift from colonial rule and domination to a position not so much of independence as of being in-dependence" (p. 3). Historical and cultural consequences of colonialism, as commented by John McLeod (2007), are still "a part of the present and still have the capacity to exert 'pressures' today" (p. 4). These imperialism's lingering effects (Said, 1993), and the state of being in-

dependence (Young, 2003), as well as the exerting pressures (McLeod, 2007) are closely related to the legacies and residues of American slavery that are still very much part of the American landscape today. How inhumane African Americans got depicted in the collective imagination then has changed very little now. The dominant discourse regarding the black others has been continually and systematically constructed and sustained to serve the needs of the dominant group and to keep American blacks in their assigned positions (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Pyke, 2010; Collins, 2009; Tyson, 2006; hooks, 1994a; Morrison, 1992). The damage of this continued and systematic enterprise of demonising the black others, especially that directed towards the self, as previously discussed in the chosen novels, is paramount. But as 'hatred', as convincingly put by Lorde (1984), can 'destroy', its destructive force will not and cannot stop at the self. It is vital, therefore, to discuss every aspect of internalised racism, how it ravages the self, as well as the others within the black communities, or so-called intra-racial racism. For doing so would help explain and expose, argues Karen Pyke (2010), "the extensive harm of White domination" (p. 567), and thus "the blame will shift from the victims to the structure of racial inequality and those who are its beneficiaries" (p. 566, see more discussions of structural flaws versus individuals' defects in Chapter 4).

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison (1999) distinctly brings to light the detriment of one's contempt towards one's own kind. The way Pecola Breedlove gets verbally abused by other black boys in her community, "Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadadsleepsnekked. Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps necked" clearly

exemplifies the perpetrators' "smoothly cultivated ignorance (...) exquisitely learned self-hatred" (p. 50), essentially white-infiltrated individuals. As commented by its child narrator Claudia, "It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth" (p. 50). And when such contempt is unleashed, it is capable of "consuming whatever was in its path" (p. 50). This type of contempt towards one's own kind and community as a result of 'learned self-hatred' also reverberates across the three children's and young adult novels chosen for this chapter. Precious Jones and Maleeka Madison are always berated and penalised by their own black peers for their 'blackness': "Claireece is so ugly she laffing ugly (...) No, that fat bitch is crying ugly" (Sapphire, 1996, p.12); "Maleeka, Maleeka—baboom, boom, boom, we sure wanna keep her, baboom, boom, boom, but she so black, baboom, boom, boom, we just can't see her" (Flake, 1998, p. 3). By chiding and penalising Pecola, Precious and Maleeka for something with which they were born and over which they have no control—the colour of their skin and practices within the black family, these boys, as commented by Cormier-Hamilton (1994), "Censure their own cultural identities" (p. 116).

The manifestation of this type of self-hatred within the black communities has surfaced in many forms, from endless, psychologically devastating teasing as shown above to disrespecting one's own race. When "sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds [and] spilled over lips of outrage" (Morrison, 1999, p. 50), hatred can be deadly. Prior to attending Each One Teach One and being introduced to various black cultural

icons, Precious's resentment toward other black people is apparent. She hates her own mother for being "fat black" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 29); her determination to sit in Mr Wicher's 'maff' class has nothing to do with her own learning or his teaching styles but only to help him "keep those rowdy niggers in line" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 7); she hates black crack addicts, and has commented more than once throughout the first half of the book that "they give the race a bad name" (Sapphire, 1996, pp. 14, 37). Judging the world through a pair of infiltrated eyes, Precious's perception of other American blacks is brimmed with negative traits. Once realising that her new teacher at Each One Teach One is also black, her socially programmed, racially biased self is actuated, "Oh well teacher nigger too. Don't care if she teacher, don't know niggers start on time" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 38), giving, as a result, 'the first insult its teeth'. As commented by Morrison (1999) through her narrator in *The Bluest Eye*, these are accusations or insults about "matters over which the victim had no control" (p. 50). How drugs and poverty have ravaged black and other ethnic communities throughout the US and how racial profiling has been unfairly used by law enforcement, as suggested by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), Collins (2009) and Tyson (2006), are closely related to structural failures, not individual flaws or one's skin colour. Once again this demonstrates how the image of black men and women gets negatively painted and sustained in the collective imagination, and how it thoroughly penetrates and devours the black mind. It is vital, therefore, for African Americans, as suggested by hooks (1994a) in her discussion of the problem of internalised racism, to decolonise their own minds and to demythologise the very idea falsely advocated in the dominant

discourse that “a hatred for blackness emerges from troubled individual psyches” (p. 213).

Another phenomenon closely associated with intra-racial racism and internalised racism is known as *defensive othering*, chiefly an attempt employed by the subjugated to become part of the dominant group or to distance themselves from the stereotypes attached to them (Schwalbe et al., 2000). In *I Like White Boys*, one of the short stories included in *Who Am I Without Him*, Flake (2005), through her female character Erika, discloses the harm caused by this racial phenomenon. Erika embraces whiteness and perceives the world only through the white gaze. Any association with ‘blackness’ embarrasses or repels her—“In a few minutes our table is full of kids. All black. All loud (...) I am so embarrassed. All the other kids are looking over their shoulders. Rolling their eyes. Wondering, I bet, why we can’t act right” (p. 107). Attempting to distance herself from this ‘Little Africa’ table, Erika always finds herself at the back of the lunchroom. Her obsession with whiteness also manifests itself through her use of language. “Don’t say *ain’t*” (p. 101, italics in original), she reminds her friend Winter, “You know how to speak *good* English” (p. 101, italics in original). By ‘whitening’ her language, Erika has been led to believe that she can truly escape any negative attributes associated with blackness. How the wound of internalised racism manifests itself through the victim’s use of language, how the tongue gets whitened, and how it at times gets tied as a result of psychological mutilation, will be explored in depth in Chapter 3 TONGUE-TIED.

One of the explanations leading several black individuals to engage in defensive othering is aptly provided by Audre Lorde (1984) in her book of essays *Sister Outsider*. In her discussion of self-protection myths included in “Eye to Eye”, one of the critical essays centring on black women’s anger and hatred and how to channel them to a greater good, Lorde states that these myths keep black women apart and “breed harshness and cruelty where we most need softness and understanding” (p. 168). The reason certain distance is maintained among American blacks, be it physically or psychologically, she goes on to say, is because “that distance between us makes me less you, makes you less me” (p. 168). By refusing to make ‘ain’t’ part of her vocabulary, by shunning her peers with unkind words and relocating herself to the back of the lunchroom to keep some distance from the ‘Little Africa’, Erika is led to believe that those damaging images and stereotypes that black people have been made to endure are not applicable to her and that she is finally part of the dominant group and norms. As suggested by Lorde (1984), “I must attack you first before our enemies confuse us with each other” (p. 169). Erika is also convinced that an intentional act of divorcing herself from the black crowd and all the negative traits they stand for would grant her access to white privileges. She puts herself in what Sander Gilman (1986) calls a double bind situation—abiding by the dominant rules and shunning her own otherness. However, what Erika fails to realise, regardless of her ‘distancing and othering’ strategies, is that ‘they’ will ‘confuse us with each other’ anyway. As fittingly summed up by Young (2003) in his take on postcolonialism, “Though you may assimilate white values, you never can quite become white enough” (p. 23). What this seems to bring to light is the

danger of, to borrow Du Bois's (1989) words, "Measuring one's soul by the tape of the world" (p. 3). For it can turn one against the self and the others, and it seems hardest on the young minds because it can impede their identity development (Hipolito-Delgado, 2007), as reflected through fictional characters mentioned above. In a collection of his essays *Going to the Territory*, Ralph Ellison (1986) discusses how, whilst attempting to gain a sense of belonging, children can be culturally deprived and trapped by negative images circulated in the society. His prime concern gets boiled down to the fact that children in America, unfortunately, are not equipped with any tool "to reject enough of the negative values which our society presses upon them. Nor have they been trained sufficiently to preserve those values which sustained their forefathers and which constitute an import part of their heritage" (pp. 553-554). By distancing themselves from the images or stereotypes associated with the subordinate group, African Americans help reproduce and sustain social inequality and thus suffer internalised racism (Schwalbe et al., 2000).

2.5 Final Words

The focus of this chapter is on internalised racism and its psychological manifestation. Through their young and black female characters, children's and young adult authors above unveil the unspeakable shame caused by the wound of internalised racism, including intra-racial racism, surreptitiously hidden within the black communities. My argument regarding the literary characters' psychological wounds is primarily premised on or attributed to the detriment of

controlling images still ravaging American landscape today. From a CRT standpoint, these images are not only socially constructed or manipulated, but their social construction also gets shifted, at different times, in response to the shifting needs of the dominant group (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Collins, 2009). Internalising such disparaging images, therefore, can result in both individual and collective wounds, which are physically and psychologically damaging, particularly for the youngsters who are struggling to form their own identity and self-esteem (Cokley, 2002; hooks, 1994a), as depicted by children's and young adult authors through their young female characters in the focus texts. The chapter also takes into account the issue of *intra-racial racism*, also known as *colourism* or *colour caste system*, referring to racial discrimination within the black community against those with darker skin and more African features. This type of frictions within the black community, including the use of 'defensive othering' mechanism, as I have argued, demonstrates how the image of black men and women gets negatively painted and sustained in the collective imagination, and how it thoroughly penetrates and devours the black mind.

"Everything seems like clothes in washing machine at laundry mat—round 'n round, up 'n down" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 22)—this very image of dirty laundry utilised by Sapphire (1996) in *Push*—however unsettling and ignominious, particularly among American Blacks—clearly brings this racial issue out into the open. It is essential to discuss, and expose, as suggested by Pyke (2010) and Padilla (2001), every aspect of internalised racism and its many faces, for doing so would help shift the blame from individual psychological flaws to the root of

the problem, which, I believe, is closely tied to political and structural defects, the point that will be taken up in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3

TONGUE-TIED: Linguistic Violence and Internalised Racism

3.1 Introduction

He will practice not only rolling his *R* but embroidering it. Furtively observing the slightest reactions of others, listening to his own speech, suspicious of his own tongue—a wretchedly lazy organ—he will lock himself into his room and read aloud for hours—desperately determined to learn *diction*.

—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967, p. 11)

On his encounter with a Russian or a German speaking broken French, Fanon (1967) states that such an accented tongue, however unintelligible, is often tolerated; it does not make the speaker ‘less’ than who he is, largely because “he has a language of his own, a country, and that perhaps he is a lawyer or an engineer there” (p. 21). Accented French spoken by the Negro in metropolitan France, however, as Fanon (1967) argues, does not seem to be met with the same tolerance. His linguistic foreign-ness or inarticulateness can lead to his being easily dismissed, relegate him to an inferior position; at once, he can be labelled as someone with “no culture, no civilization, no “long historical past”” (p. 21). On the other hand, if his articulation is executed with such linguistic mastery, he will be applauded by the white world—“At bottom you are a white man”, and granted “honorary citizenship” (p. 25). Feeling linguistically misplaced as a result of having been exposed to the racist and linguistic hegemony, it is likely that one, like Fanon, will be socially and psychologically forced not only to subscribe to the “colorless or odorless sterilized code” (Gounari and Macedo, 2009), but also to accept, ironically, such ‘honorary citizenship’. Once one’s tongue is bereft of its colour, the code produced is thus

foreign, threatening, transforming the speaker into someone unrecognisable, like the young literary beings from children's and young adult texts chosen for this chapter. These female characters, unfortunately, are made to adhere to the dominant, colourless sterilised code in a racially charged landscape, consequently leaving them linguistically crippled, historically deprived, and psychologically wounded. The act of violence committed to them, be it linguistic or historical, has inevitably led to their 'selves' being violated, shattered, and ultimately erased. How one's identity or self is shattered or made insignificant through linguistic violence and historical absences is essential for an overall discussion of this chapter, as it helps explain and expose, as discussed in Chapter 2, white domination, the structure of racial inequality, and those who are its beneficiaries (Pyke, 2010). Although I am aware of and recognise the importance of the identity politics currently celebrated in our global space, particularly in the western world, where individual differences, multiplicity, mutability, fragmentation, and deterritorialisation are key (Sim, 2005; Cevalco, 2004; Hart, 2004; Eagleton, 1996; Braidotti, 1994; Jameson, 1991; Deleuze and Guattari, 1984; etc.), my discussion and theoretical positioning of this very notion leans more towards Toni Morrison's (1997, 1989) theorisation of African American identity politics, one equipped with historical meaning and significance, as opposed to that favoured by (post)postmodernists, as will be detailed throughout the chapter, particularly in section 3.4, in relation to the novels chosen. Morrison's view on history is also consonant with CRT analysis as it takes into account contextual and historical significance (Mutua, 2010).

In her 1993's Nobel lecture, Toni Morrison warns of oppressive language and its detrimental effects, particularly toward the young and vulnerable, as she asserts—"Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge" (Peterson, 1997, p. 269). In this chapter, how linguistic violence is committed, how the knowledge is limited, and the tongue 'de-coloured' are demonstrated through the young female characters' struggles to negotiate and position themselves in the linguistically-biased society. Whilst some succeed, others find the enemy, both within and without, too powerful to resist. Through four literary texts penned by three children's and young adult authors: Tanita S Davis' (2009) *Mare's War*, Sharon G Flake's (2005) *Who Am I Without Him* and her 1998's *The Skin I'm In*, and Sapphire's (1996) *Push*, not only does the issue of internalised racism and its linguistic manifestation get pushed to the fore, but it also demonstrates why literary texts are vital in bringing into the limelight social issues and phenomena. Catalysed by Toni Morrison's (1999) *The Bluest Eye*, and theoretically assisted by Critical Race Theory (CRT), particularly its following tenets: *The Social Construction of Race*, *Differential Racialisation*, *Everyday Racism*, as previously discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, as well as feminist views, the result of linguistic violence committed in the (current) American landscape has become apparent, especially towards the young American Blacks.

Following are key sections outlining how one is made tongue-tied and dehistoricised: (i) *Ain't No 'Ain't' in the Dictionary, Private!*, discussing tongue-

tying from a theoretical and historical viewpoint, and its effects towards the young characters, including the discussion of the importance of literary texts in making visible social issues and phenomena; (ii) *You Know How to Speak 'Good' English*, examining, with the help of CRT and feminist views, fictional representations of linguistic intra-racial racism, how linguistic ideology causes frictions within the black communities, as seen through the life of young and black female characters; (iii) *Dehistoricised Me*, looking at how linguistic hegemony, drawing on Toni Morrison's (1998, 1997, 1989, 1987) notion of history, can lead to one being historically deprived. Including also as an integral part of its discussion is the politics of identity in the current climate of (post)postmodernism and capitalist globalisation; and (iv) *Final Words*, providing a brief summary of the chapter.

3.2 Ain't No 'Ain't' in the Dictionary, Private!

Marey Lee Boylen, or better known as Mare in Tanita S Davis's (2009) *Mare's War*, is a vivacious fictional character—a World War II veteran of the Women's Army Corps and, evidently, not “a cookie type” (p. 1) grandmother. As described by her 15-year-old granddaughter Octavia, she “isn't at all normal. She doesn't read mystery novels, or sing in a church choir, or knit, or sew. She isn't at all soft (...) She wears flippy auburn wigs, stiletto shoes, and padded push-up bras” (p. 1). And she can be ‘nosy’, talking to complete strangers, asking any questions that come to her mind without any self-restraint, “As if just because she's old, she can afford to be rude” (p. 2). In sum, “My grandmother, Ms. Marey Lee

Boylen, is not the cookie type” (p. 1). What young Octavia and her 17-year-old sister Talitha initially fail to understand is that, as a young girl growing up in the segregated south during the Great Depression and later joining the African American battalion of the Women’s Army Corps in 1944, the young Marey Lee Boylen was hardly nosy and always watched her own (black) speech. “Say ‘I don’t have boots’” (p. 72), she was told by Captain Ferguson who was in charge of her unit to correct her English, “Ain’t no ‘ain’t’ in the dictionary, Private” (p. 72). Constantly, she was reminded both by army authorities and her own peers to ‘whiten’ her tongue. After a while, sadly yet inevitably, it started to tie up and she found an act as simple as talking awkward, baffling, threatening—“I am scared to open my mouth” (p. 72).

Whilst Davis’s (2009) Mare is a literary character set up to help readers experience racial injustice and linguistic ideologies of the American past, Sharon G Flake’s (2005) Erika of *I Like White Boys* and Maleeka Madison of her 1998’s *The Skin I’m In* are created as part of contemporary America. Each, as will be explored in detail below, has gone through similar experience, particularly with regard to linguistic hegemony that still plagues the American landscape today. Being obsessed with and possessed by whiteness, as implied by the story title, Erika’s tongue is already whitened. It is she who attempts to clean up other ‘black’ tongues. “Don’t say *ain’t*” (Flake, 2005, p. 101, italics in original), she reminds her close friend Winter, who refuses to comply, “*Ain’t ain’t* a bad word (...) that’s how we talk in the ghetto” (p. 101, italics in original). Being ‘ghetto girls’ on scholarship at a predominantly white private school,

Erika takes it upon herself to police her friend's Black English—"I'm just saying. You know how to speak *good* English" (p. 101, italics in original). Being perpetually haunted by her own dark skin, Maleeka Madison of *The Skin I'm In* also allows linguistic hegemony to invade her personal space. When asked by Ms Saunders, her temporary African American teacher, to assume a life of someone living in the seventeenth century through a form of diary writing, Maleeka reinvents herself as Akeelma (her name spelled backward), an African girl sold to slavery during the Middle Passage, chained in the bottom of a boat, on her way to America. In her diary, surprisingly, Akeelma speaks only 'proper' English. When confronted by her friend Desda, "How come you don't talk proper, like Akeelma talks in her diary?" (Flake, 1998, p. 27), Maleeka replies, switching back to Black English, "Don't nobody talk like that for real, only people in old movies and books" (p. 27).

These female characters and the texts they inhabit, though fictionally constructed, I believe, are dynamic, offering, through authoritative narrators and authorial voices and viewpoints, realistic accounts of what it is like to be young and black and female in contemporary, racialised America. Fiction, argues Toni Morrison (1998) in "The Site of Memory", does provide 'truth' by fusing the world of facts with that of imagination. Facts alone, which can be obtained not only through research but also "memories and recollections" (p. 192), states Morrison, are inadequate, as they do not equip writers with what she refers to as "the mystery [or] the unwritten interior life" (p. 192). Only imagination does. The combination or co-existence of the two worlds—facts

and imagination—is therefore crucial, for it provides, suggests Morrison, both “the actual and the possible” (p. 197). The ‘unwritten interior life’ is key here, particularly for the present study, as it helps, through the act of imagination, fictionally reconstruct inner psychological and linguistic wounds of those haunted by internalised racism in ways that factual evidence alone is perhaps inadequate or less powerful in drawing the reader’s belief and sympathy. As suggested by Christine Wilkie-Stibbs (2008) in *The Outside Child In and Out of the Book*, “Literature at its best is what most convinces us of the realities of other people’s identities and selfhoods”, and if “responsibly written and attempting authenticity”, not only can it make “the readers feel *for* the characters, if not *as* the characters”, but also “act as powerful and memorable case histories which are as true as, or truer than, factually accurate ones” (pp. 26-27, italics in original). In his essay on “Postmodern Culture”, Cornel West (1993b) states that modern-day America is plagued with the culture of “silences and blindnesses” (p. 43), one that veils “pervasive violence (psychic and physical) and fear of it among all sectors of the population” (p. 43). Often, asserts West, it is contemporary literary figures such as Toni Morrison, Russell Banks, Joyce Carol Oates, etc., not ‘critics and theorists’, who come forward and tackle such violence in a “sophisticated and subtle manner, [be it] the hidden injuries of class, intra-racial hostilities, the machismo identity taken out on women, and the intolerance of gay and lesbian orientations” (p. 43). Part of that violence and fear, which also includes, if I may add—the hidden injury of race, psychic in particular, is also responsibly and authentically captured in a ‘sophisticated and subtle manner’ by contemporary children’s and young adult

authors, some of which are chosen for this study. In “The Site of Memory”, Morrison (1998) states that writers or creators of fiction are like floods, obviously not flooding in a general sense, but flooding as in remembering—“Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were (...) And a rush of our imagination is our “flooding”” (p. 199). It is through this line of arguments that I believe children’s and young adult texts chosen for this study will yield a powerful and realistic sketch of the issue of internalised racism in America today, including its linguistic manifestation, which is the focus of this chapter.

As a result of having been exposed and acculturated to the racist society and linguistic ideologies, these female characters’ language identity is unfortunately split, shattered, being made to choose or adhere to the oppressor’s tool at the expense of their own linguistic erasure, as movingly yet disturbingly articulated by the American poet Adrienne Rich (1971)—“This is the oppressor’s language/yet I need it to talk to you” (p. 16). My use of such adjectives as ‘fragmented’, ‘fragmentary’, ‘shattered’ or ‘split’ in relation to the concept of identity, self or subjecthood is different from that proposed by postmodernists (see its full discussion in section 3.4 below). This very split or shattering of identity resonates Toni Morrison’s (1989) discussion of trauma brought about by racism. In “Unspeakable Things Unspoken”, Morrison, on re-investigating and re-analysing Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* through a new Africanist reading method, states that “The trauma of racism is, for the racist and the victim, the

severe fragmentation of the self” (p. 214). How the self gets fragmented or shattered as a result of being exposed to racism and racist ideologies is manifested, clearly, not only through various forms of psychological mutilations as extensively discussed in Chapter 2, but also through language use, as revealed by the three literary characters above. Mare, Erika and Maleeka are put in an acutely linguistically vulnerable position. Whichever path they choose to embark on, they run the risk of being shunned by both black and white spheres. To reiterate W E B Du Bois’s (1989) words, these characters are experiencing what he refers to as “double consciousness” or “two-ness (...) two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (p. 3), which, according to Lois Tyson (2006) also includes speaking or struggling between two languages: dominant standard American English and African American Vernacular or Black English or Ebonics. Unfortunately, the latter is often dismissed or labelled as substandard, impoverished, lazy, illegitimate, bastardised, linguistically deficient (Wolfram, 2010; Gounari and Macedo, 2009; Tyson, 2006; Rickford, 2003; Anzaldúa, 1999; Woolard, 1998). It should not be a surprise, therefore, for these characters to feel tongue-tied, and to eventually resort to speaking or embracing only so-called “good English” (Flake, 2005, p. 101).

“To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture”, utters Fanon (1967, p. 25). To speak, for Fanon, is not only about one’s ability to master certain syntactic and morphological structures of a certain language, but it is also how one is linguistically equipped “to assume a culture, to support the weight of a

civilization” (p. 8). In an explication of his ‘two-dimensions’ phenomenon regarding the Negro of the Antilles (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3 for the discussion of Fanon’s ‘two-dimensions’), Fanon stresses that “he [the Negro] will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language” (p. 8), chiefly because “mastery of language affords remarkable power” (p. 9), and because adopting the language of the mother country could certainly help raise the status of the colonised—“He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle” (p. 9). The idea that language is a ‘carrier of culture’ is also echoed in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s (1986) discussion of the language of African literature. In *Decolonising the Mind*, wa Thiong’o asserts that “culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next” (p. 15), and that one’s identity, values as well as a sense of particularity are manifested through language. Unfortunately, through colonialism, the status of the language of the colonised is destroyed or deliberately undervalued while that of the coloniser is consciously elevated (wa Thiong’o, 1986).

It is through this type of analysis that has certainly helped evoke the fabrication of racial discourse and put languages of the colonised and colonisers at two opposing ends, with one perpetually occupying its linguistically superior status; and it is also this type of analysis that makes language and race become inseparable. As elaborated by Bill Ashcroft (2001) in “Language and Race”, the power gained from mastering the dominant language has become “a *signifier* of

culture, which, like whiteness, signifies social and cultural dominance” (p. 324, *italics in original*). How language comes to be seen through moral and cultural dimensions resonates the western idea of race and its social construction, which foregrounds some of the major tenets of Critical Race Theory, such as the *Social Construction of Race* and *Differential Racialisation*, as discussed under the theoretical/methodological framework in Chapter 1. As a matter of fact, as suggested by Ashcroft (2001) in the same article, “Language and race are deeply implicated in Western thought” (p. 311). Throughout the nineteenth century, the rise of philology and ethnology had served as “a powerful foundation for the marriage of linguistic hegemony and racial marginalisation that came to be fundamental to imperial discourse” (p. 311), and language differences were viewed as a marker of “differences in moral and mental capacities” (p. 319). Whilst languages of western colonising countries were viewed as linguistically sophisticated and highly superior, capable of handling complex thoughts, those belonging to the colonised, argues Ashcroft (2001), were seen as inferior, substandard, another reason to justify western domination—“If races are primitive today the fault is in their ancestors who created their languages. Needless to say the European nations should move in to ‘civilise’ them” (p. 322). What is demoralising is how the language, through its “chromatic signifiers” (p. 315), has been systematically deployed to perform “the cultural work of racial ‘othering’” (p. 315), and how this assumption or belief still lingers today (Ashcroft, 2001).

“I’m scared to open my mouth” (p. 72)—confesses the protagonist of Davis’s (2009) *Mare’s War*, and the self-imposed fear of exposing her own ‘bastardised, linguistically deficient’ black tongue spreads through her entire narrative. As the book alternates between NOW and THEN, with the latter being told from Mare’s point of view in a first person narrative, it is obvious that her voice is infiltrated and invaded by the dominant tongue. All through her own narrative, Mare utilises ‘self-correction’ as a linguistic strategy to whiten her language, “I got a good mind to write Miss Ida and tell her a thing or two. She *don’t—doesn’t*—think I know how to act, but I will show her” (p. 82, my italics); “There *ain’t*—I mean, *isn’t*—no privacy in the army, they tell us, so we go in and shower and keep our eyes on the floor. Now we all so tired *don’t nobody—nobody* cares anymore” (p. 122, my italics). Flake’s (1998) protagonist of *The Skin I’m In*, Maleeka Madison, also rids herself of any linguistic association with Black English in her diary writing. Through her invented self—Akeelma—Maleeka’s writing is flawless, poetic, strictly white, “I want to hold onto the sun for as long as I can. To save up the picture for when I am below again and need to remember that the sun is always shining. I squeezed my eyes closed till I see stars” (p. 104). Whilst her actual speech is enriched and made vivid by her Black vernacular, “Don’t nobody talk like that for real” (p. 27), her writing, being invaded by the dominant language, leaves Maleeka linguistically bereft, having been made, socially and psychologically, to witness her own tongue bleached. Akeelma, therefore, comes to signify Maleeka’s “severe fragmentation of the self” (Morrison, 1989, p. 214)—a girl caught and shattered linguistically between the two worlds—“two warring ideals in one dark body” (Du Bois,

1989, p. 3). Maleeka's self fragmentation, as well as Mare's, is perhaps comparable to what wa Thiong'o (1986) terms colonial alienation, a condition when a colonial child is dissociated from his natural and social environment and made "to stand outside himself to look at himself (...) to see the world and where he stands in it as seen and defined by or reflected in the culture of the language of imposition" (p. 17). The concocted Akeelma, therefore, can only express herself linguistically in the white tongue because in the mind of its creator, Maleeka, the black tongue is perceived to be associated with "low status, humiliation, corporal punishment, slow-footed intelligence and ability or downright stupidity, non-intelligibility and barbarism" (wa Thiong'o, 1986, p. 18). Maleeka, in her 'real' world, has already robbed herself once of an opportunity to be part of a better education, as she finds 'whiteness' at the new private school too dazzling, "No Almond Joy-colored girls like me" (Flake, 1998, p. 39). When presented with a new window by her temporary teacher Ms Saunders, though her grim reality still remains unchanged, Maleeka opens it. For through the imaginative act of writing, she gets to transport herself to the white world, and through her hidden whitened tongue—become part of it. The irony is young Akeelma, as Maleeka's fabricated self, is ruthlessly plucked from some village in Africa, sold to slavery, chained in the bottom of a boat, being taken to the unknown, yet speaks perfect English!

As stated by bell hooks (1994b) in *Teaching to Transgress*, "It is not the English language that hurts me, but what the oppressors do with it, how they shape it to become a territory that limits and defines, how they make it a weapon that can

shame, humiliate, colonize” (p. 168). Since the dawn of Western Imperialism, language has always been part and parcel of the tool used to perform the work of racial othering (Ashcroft, 2001). As discussed in Chapter 1, not only were the colonised depicted as raw, savage, irrational, sinful, ugly, immoral, inferior (Morrison, 1992; hooks, 1982; Fanon, 1967), their languages were also disdained and debased—a true reflection of their perceived physical traits (Ashcroft, 2001; wa Thiong’o, 1986); their tongues, as Fanon (1967) publicly self-decries—“a wretchedly lazy organ” (p. 11). If one could internalise racist ideologies and, through social and psychological mechanism, be made to partake in an act of self-loathing, being constantly exposed to linguistic ideologies would certainly yield a similar result, and the consequence is equally disastrous, both towards the self and within the black communities. If part of one’s identity is premised on one’s (native) language (wa Thiong’o, 1986), an inability to give it a voice in its own native tongue can certainly lead to one’s psychological obliteration and linguistic erasure, also both within and without, as demonstrated by literary characters from the chosen texts.

3.3 You Know How to Speak ‘Good’ English

Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy [...] See jane she has a red dress she wants to play who will play with jane see the cat it goes meow-meow come and play come play with jane (...) Thekittenwillnotplayseemothermotherisverynicemotherwillyouplaywithjanemother laughslaughmotherlaughseefatherheisbigandstrongfatherwillyouplaywithjanefatherissmil ingsmilefathersmile.

—Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1999, pp. 2-3)

The Dick-and-Jane reading primer introduced at the outset of Toni Morrison’s (1999) *The Bluest Eye*, as cited above, is intended to provide not only a stark

contrast between an idyllic (white) family and the ‘ugly’ Breedloves, but also a crucial part language plays in forming and defining one’s social reality (Barthes, 1981), as powerfully illustrated by Sapphire (1996) through her female protagonist in *Push*, previously discussed in Chapter 2, in connection with psychological wounds. When partially or unconsciously employed, particularly by state authorities, not only can one’s reality, such as that of Precious, be severely contorted, but such an unjust and degrading act can also end up reproducing and sustaining the practice of racial othering. By collapsing its syntactic structures, removing all punctuations and decapitalising all proper nouns, Morrison (1999) discloses how language can get embroiled in power structures, and how it can result in one’s fractured or fragmented reality, as displayed by the Breedlove family, particularly the ostracised and self-loathed Pecola. Through the power of language, Morrison meticulously and adeptly de- and re-constructs the primer, exposing its apparent binary oppositions, and ultimately unveiling the ideological hegemony and the destructive force of whiteness. As she aptly puts in the preface of her 1992’s *Playing in the Dark*, which certainly uncloaks American literary landscape—past and present, “I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive “othering” of people” (x). Her writings, as well as those by children’s and young adult authors included in this study, therefore, are both an attempt and a struggle “to free up the language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains” (Morrison, 1992, xi). Apart from its ‘sinister employment’ of

language and the dominance of African American vernacular, what makes *The Bluest Eye* relevant and significant in contemporary America, as suggested by George Yancy (2008) in *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race*, lies in “its location, exposure, and interrogation of the semiotic spaces of whiteness” (p. 184), and how it unearths “the psychological price paid for bleaching the Negro soul in a flood of whiteness” (p. 184). Also, the fact that the book’s key message still resurfaces, four decades later, in various platforms, including in children’s and young adult books chosen for this study, speaks volumes of its magnitude, not only as a major piece of American literature but also as a testament to racialised America. Its continuing influence on both literary and non-literary worlds reaffirms, once again, that race/racism is never a thing of the past, and that post-racial America is perhaps far-fetched, elusive and futile. For racism is still alive and thriving, inhabiting “every nook and cranny of American life” (Yancy, 2008, p. 191), ravaging almost every aspect of African American lives and psyches, including their black tongue as exhibited by the young literary characters in this chapter. Each is invaded or possessed by whiteness to such a degree that their black self is compromised or obliterated, their tongues whitened. The irony is the damage is done even without the presence of any white characters. As pointed out by the third person narrator in Morrison’s (1999, p. 28) *The Bluest Eye*,

You look at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question.

‘Their conviction’, obviously, is substantiated by ‘a cloak’ or idealised whiteness

dictated by a 'mysterious all-knowing master', whose (invisible) presence is all-pervasive. In an article examining the twenty-first-century notion of 'racelessness', which has currently gained momentum and popularity in the American racial discourse, Emily Bernard (2011) emphasises that "In fact, and in fiction, it is very much alive. For all of its drawbacks, race is, indeed, the story of where we come from, and how we still live" (p. 14). She argues that the term is nothing but a "twenty-first-century incarnation of the civil rights-era concept of color blindness (...) It is code for a common ambition to avoid the realities of institutional racial inequalities, as well as personal experiences of cultural difference (p. 5). She also believes that the reincarnated 'colour blindness' in contemporary America is "a symptom of something like an epidemic, and more than a willed blindness but a muteness too" (p. 12). Like other critical race theorists, Bernard (2011) is convinced that race is a social construction, or an invention, yet "that doesn't make it untrue" (p. 9).

Language, states Ralph Ellison (1964) in his critique of the 20th century American fiction and its (mal)treatment of the black others, possesses the power not only to revitalise and liberate, but also to "blind, imprison and destroy" (p. 81). Having been made part of a reality where your tongue is deemed inferior, where 'you-know-how-to-speak-good-English' or being silent/silenced is your only alternative, the destructive force of language suddenly becomes apparent. "That's right, you better run, you ugly yaller bitch" (Lorde, 1984, p. 194)! But to where can you run when 'every nook and cranny' of your surroundings are completely devoured by an imposing dominant

tongue that sounds familiar yet alien, physically absent yet present, linguistically sophisticated yet threatening? As attested to by hooks (1994b), language and words do “intrude, even violate the most private spaces of mind and body” (p. 167). And when your mind is violated, you start to resent your own illegitimate tongue, assigning blame where it needs praise, and eventually committing linguistic suicide—turning from half-white to completely white, as displayed by Mare and Erika, respectively.

In “How to Tame a Wild Tongue”, one of the chapters included in her groundbreaking *Borderlands (La Frontera): The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) asserts that “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language” (p. 81, my italics). She also further comments that “until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself (...) and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate” (p. 81). However, it is difficult or even tongue-tiring, particularly for the young and vulnerable, to remain proud when your linguistic identity is constantly disparaged and made orphaned—“Racially, culturally, linguistically *somos huérfanos*—we speak an orphan tongue” (Anzaldúa, 1999; p. 80, italics in original). It is not a surprise, therefore, to see Mare allow linguistic whiteness to invade her personal narrative, her private space—“Nobody finds no fault with me, except my necktie ain’t—*isn’t*—straight (Davis, 2009, p. 95, my italics); and to witness Maleeka’s prose turning completely white—“Where do you run when there’s no place to run? They had me trapped. I could see no way out” (Flake, 1998, p. 97). Socially and

psychologically, these two characters are made to live in what Panayota Gounari and Donaldo Macedo (2009) refer to as a “borrowed reality” (p. 34), where their attempt to be part of the dominant culture, no matter how hard they try, ironically, only gives them a half or hyphenated version of Americanness—African-Americans. They will never feel fully American.

Like psychological wounds, the manifestation of internalised racism through the victim’s use of language is directed not only toward the self, as experienced by Mare and Maleeka above, but also the black others. As commented by Anzaldúa (1999), “Because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other” (p. 80). In what follows are traumatic experiences regarding ‘linguistic othering’ within the black community undergone by literary characters of Sharon G Flake’s (2005) *I Love White Boys* and Sapphire’s (1996) *Push*.

As harshly judged by her friend Melvin, “‘Cause with Er’ka, you get two for one. A black girl on the outside, and a Wendy-white girl on the inside” (Flake, 2005, p. 109), Erika is already taken. The presence of whiteness sits permanently in her black body. “My name isn’t Er’ka. It’s Erika. E-r-i-k-a” (Flake, 2005, p. 106), she hates the way her name sounds on black boys’ tongues. “It’s Erika. So say it the right way—the *white* way” (Flake, 2005, p. 106, italics in original), replies Melvin, and, realising that Erika does not want to be part of his lunch table, he then asks, sarcastically, “You looking for the white kids? They’re over there”

(Flake, 2005, p. 107). What Melvin fails to realise is that Erika too *is* a white kid—inside and out. Not only does she resent any association with blackness, particularly when being physically placed in a predominantly white school setting, but Erika also takes it upon herself, as if being instructed by a ‘mysterious all-knowing master’, to perform his unfinished job of whitening her friend’s tongue—“Don’t say *ain’t* (...) You know how to speak *good* English” (Flake, 2005, p. 101, italics in original). Refusing to comply, her friend Winter charges back, “*Black* English is *good* English. But maybe it *ain’t* good enough for you” (Flake, 2005, p. 101, italics in original). Linguistically, as previously discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.2 and Chapter 2, Section 2.4, Erika is also engaging in defensive othering, utilising ‘distancing and othering’ strategies to divorce or remove herself from Black English and her black peers. In her attempt to critically analyse and theorise why Chicano Spanish is often avoided among Chicana feminists, Anzaldúa (1999), like Audre Lorde’s (1984) analysis and theorisation of black women’s myths of self-protection in *Sister Outsider*, provides another theoretically sound explanation of why one participates in defensive othering—“To be close to another Chicana is like looking into the mirror. We are afraid of what we’ll see there. *Pena*. Shame. Low estimation of self” (p. 80, italics in original). By resorting to defensive othering, Erika believes that more distance will be put between her and what her skin or language represents, and that by discarding her black traits, including her black tongue, she will be granted access to the white world and enjoy the available, strictly in-group white privileges. What her young mind fails to grasp is that that access belongs to whites only, a white property—nontransferable. Whiteness, argues

critical race theorist Cheryl L Harris (1993), has always been treated as property in America, acknowledged and protected by law both historically and presently. Erika's journey to whiteness, therefore, sees only her departure, with no arrival in sight. She will never get there. Hers, to muse on Stuart Hall's melancholic narration of his diasporic experience, is "an always-postponed arrival—far away enough to experience the sense of exile and loss, close enough to understand (its) enigma" (Morley & Chen, 1996, p. 490).

CRT's *Everyday Racism*, as previously discussed in both Chapters 1 and 2, is most stressful and emotionally draining, leaving victimised individuals with deep psychological scars. This devastating, 'business-as-usual', daily experience includes, among many others, being undermined by authorities or those in the position of power. Being constantly made inferior by those authoritative figures, whether the act is done intentionally or unconsciously, the end result is equally disastrous, the wound equally deep. And when the perpetrator is one's own kind, as demonstrated by Sapphire's (1996) *Push* below, the work of the 'mysterious all-knowing master' seems to come in full circle...

"I step out the elevator and see this lady with cornrow hair sitting at desk. White sign black letters on the desk" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 25), narrates Precious, on her first encounter with the Each One Teach One staff. Tacitly, Sapphire reveals the character sitting behind the desk—black letters on the white sign. And the sign becomes even whiter when Precious opens her mouth, revealing her black tongue (Sapphire, 1996, pp. 25-26, italics in original):

"This the alternative?" I ax.
"The *what?*" She lift eyebrows.
"This the alternative?" That bitch heard me the first time!
"What exactly are you looking for?" woman nice talk.
"Well, what is this here?"
"This is Higher Education Alternative/Each One Teach One".

At once, the staff intentionally distances herself from Precious, putting her Black English under scrutiny. Through linguistic othering, the staff asserts her linguistic superiority, making Precious conscious of her 'bastardised' English. As she tries to explain what Each One Teach One is all about and what procedures involved, her language becomes more and more formal, full of jargons, linguistically complicated and white—"Each One Teach One is an alternative school and an alternative is like a choice, a different way to do something (...) You need discharge papers from your old school saying they have formally discharged you or we can't allow you in the program (...) Our students have to meet certain income, residential, and academic requirements before we can let them in the program" (Sapphire, 1996, pp. 26-27). When realising that her file gets sent over by her old school, without her prior knowledge, Precious is fuming, "I don't know what the file say. I do know every time they wants to fuck wif me or decide something in my life, here they come wif the mutherfucking file" (Sapphire 1996, p. 28).

Like Ms Weiss, the social worker, whose educated white tongue has previously relegated Precious to the realm of domestic service, working as a 'home attendant' (see also Chapter 2, Section 2.3), the staff at Each One Teach One deploys the same strategy. For the lack of power to assign Precious to a

subordinate position, she substitutes it with her perceived linguistic superiority, reducing Precious into both a child that needs to be led/dragged by the hand, and an adult whose linguistic and intellectual faculty is not yet fully formed. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1967) discusses the concept known as ‘the collapse of antennae’ where ‘pidgin-nigger talking’ is employed by a white man to address the Negro—“Sure, fella. You go out door, see, go corridor, you go straight, go one car, go two car, go three car, you there” (p. 23). Through such ‘jabbering’ or linguistic othering, not only is a black man being treated as/or reduced to a child linguistically, he is also being reminded of his place, his assigned, subordinate position—“To make him talk pidgin is to fasten him to the effigy of him, to snare him, to imprison him, the eternal victim of an essence, of an *appearance* for which he is not responsible” (p. 22, italics in original). By treating or addressing Precious in a child-like manner—“An alternative is like a choice, a different way to do something” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 26), the staff at Each One Teach One establishes and secures her position as an adult with power to impose and words to define. And since Precious’s language is perceived as that of a ‘pidgin-nigger’—“What alternative is?” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 26), the staff’s self-elevated, linguistically-superior position is validated. Whilst Fanon’s (1967) collapse of the antennae can help explain the staff’s initial reaction towards Precious, it does not justify her later use of jargons and linguistic complexity, “Our students have to meet certain income, residential, and academic requirements (...) Oh you’ve had amniocentesis?” (Sapphire, 1996, pp. 27-28). The staff’s intentional act of ‘repositioning’ her antennae, linguistically alienating Precious, turning her back into an intellectually inferior

adult, clearly baffles her—"Huh?" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 28). If being physically close to your own kind brings about linguistic shame—*pena*, as stated by Anzaldúa (1999), then "I must attack you first before our enemies confuse us with each other" (Lorde, 1984, p. 169) is perhaps a better justification or explanation of the staff's subsequent linguistic complexity and distancing, which reveals, once again, not only the presence of whiteness and its pervading nature, but also the dehistoricisation of one's identity and reality.

3.4 Dehistoricised Me

In "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children", one of the poems included in *The Will to Change*, American poet Adrienne Rich (1971) puts (male) language under scrutiny, unmasking its biased nature as a "map of our failures" (p. 18), and that "In America we have only the present tense. I am in danger. You are in danger" (p. 18). Although her poem is intended to rail against political events of the 1960s and the inequality between men and women, particularly in the realm of language, its message, clearly, can be extended, beyond time and space (and race), to include other oppressed ethnic minorities, including African Americans, who have been made to adopt the dominant tongue and bear witness the loss of their own—"This is the oppressor's language/yet I need it to talk to you" (p. 16). Rich's evocation of America as possessing only 'the present tense' insinuates how one's identity can be jeopardised and eventually obliterated through the very act of adopting the oppressor's linguistic tool—*I am in danger. You are in danger.*

The danger, as suggested by Panayota Gounari and Donaldo Macedo (2009), lies in the fact that language, in its current American political climate, has been dehistoricised, and that it has been completely divorced from culture, resulting in an erasure of “a long history of immigration, bilingualism, linguistic oppression, and racism” (p. 37). In their book chapter entitled “Language as Racism: A New Policy of Exclusion”, included in *Beyond Pedagogies of Exclusion in Diverse Childhood Contexts*, Gounari and Macedo (2009) critique the language policy and English-only movements in the United States, and provide theoretically-sound explanations of the danger of linguistic assimilation through monolingual, English-only education. America, they argue, “was founded on a cultural and linguistic hegemony that privileged and assigned control to the white patriarchy and relegated other racial, cultural, and gender groups to a culture of silence” (p. 33). And by sanctioning only standard American English, or what both refer to as “a colorless or odorless sterilized code” (p. 41), the implication is simply that “language is dehistoricized and that we, as humans, have *no obvious markers of identity* (such as ethnicity, culture, race, class, gender, or sexual orientation) reflected and refracted through our language” (p. 41, my italics).

How one’s identity is marked, shaped, re-presented or constructed, particularly in relation to the current terrain of (post)postmodernism and capitalist globalisation, is consequential for the present discussion of the identity and linguistic crises undergone by young and black female characters chosen for

this chapter, as well as the rest of this study. For it helps illustrate not only how vital a role present-day politics of identity plays, but also how it gets translated into the realm of contemporary children's and young adult literature. My use of the word postmodernism here, following Terry Eagleton's (1996) use of this word in *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, covers both postmodernity as a style of thought suspicious of classical norms and postmodernism as a style of culture reflecting such thought. As widely held among postmodernists, postmodern critics and enthusiasts alike, the notion of identity or self in a postmodern, globalised space is fleeting, unstable, multiple, nomadic, fragmentary, decentred, deterritorialised, and even schizophrenic (Sim, 2005; Cevalco, 2004; Hart, 2004; Hoffman, 1999; Eagleton, 1996; Braidotti, 1994; Jameson, 1991; Deleuze and Guattari, 1984; etc.), which fittingly echoes an idea espoused by Michel Foucault (1980) in his discussion of power and knowledge that a unified and stable self is nothing but an illusion. This perhaps results from the fact that postmodernism, in its 'little-narrative' essence, celebrates "a decentering and a proliferation of differences" (Jameson, 1991, p. 66), commits to "dissent, pluralism (...), and scepticism towards authority" (Sim, 2005, xi), and that, with regard to the identity politics, it emphasises on "ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality" (Grant, 2005, 15). Taken into account the cultural side of postmodernism, where cultural pluralism and democratisation are embraced, and where, as suggested in an essay "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue" by a renowned American cultural critic Fredric Jameson (1998), "Those structures that condemned whole segments of the population to silence and to subalternity" (p. 57) are declining, perhaps this indeed is a cause for

celebration. Finally, as mocked by Maria Elisa Cevalco (2004), “Lo and behold, the subalterns could speak and their voices could be heard” (p. 101).

However, postmodernism, like any other cultural and political phenomenon or theory—past and present, does not come without a price. The very moment the economic factor is slipped into the equation, which is inevitable in this age of ‘late capitalism’, when heterogeneity is now being replaced by standardisation, massification, commodification and commercialisation, forced integration, and destruction of local differences (Jameson, 1998; West, 1993b), when, argues Paul Gilroy (2000), “Any commodity is open to being “branded” in ways that solicit identification and try to orchestrate identity” (p. 98), when (only) Angelina Jolie seems to have come to symbolise the ultimate feminine beauty, the current celebratory politics of identity is challenged, weakened—or possibly shattered. Suddenly, as suggested by Jameson (1998) in the same essay, one finds the concept “darkening and growing more opaque” (p. 57). It is darkening and growing more opaque mainly because the ineluctable marriage between the cultural and the economic, as suggested by Cevalco (2004) in her discussion of the political unconsciousness of globalisation, has turned pluralism and variety upside down, resulting, also inevitably, in “another version of massified sameness” (p. 102). Whilst postmodernists tend to believe, or have us believe, that the sense of real or deep or true self has now disappeared and been replaced instead by a collage of socially constructed one (Tseëlon, 2001), however appealing or ‘postmodern’ that might sound, in the current globalised space, which is constantly mobilised or driven by the

economic or menacing capitalism, the reality is that one's potential 'difference-and-multiplicity' self will likely to be replaced by a 'massified-sameness' or 'branded' self. And with the shifting yet persistent and systematic construction of various controlling images regarding 'otherness', African-Americans included, perpetuated by both the media and institutions, that is still rampant in the present American dominant discourse, as discussed in Chapter 2, one, particularly the young and vulnerable (and female), as demonstrated by the characters from the focus texts, is likely to be forced to subscribe to this global/local 'massified-sameness' at the expense of one's own obliteration—be it linguistic, cultural or historical. This massified-sameness or what is previously known as a universal humanity, as suggested by Eagleton (1996), "Has been one of the most brutal ways of crushing the otherness of others" (p. 49). Through this particular view, otherness is seen inevitably as nothing but a threat (Gilroy, 2000). The monolingual, English-only movement cited above is a case in point. It demonstrates how this type of massification can rob one of history and culture, leading, consequently, to 'the tongue-tying of America', a phenomenon that will be explored further below in conjunction with Sapphire's (1996) *Push*.

The fluidity of individual identity as that observed in postmodern thinking also manifests itself in cosmopolitanism, a current political theory encompassing socio-political, cultural and economic aspects of today's global village, with an aim of fusing territory-bound democracy with transborder, 'deterritorialised' globalisation (Held, 2010). Culturally, cosmopolitanism celebrates fluid, less

fixed or unified identity and one's ability to construct new identities from various cultural sources irrespective of one's familial, ethical, national, ethnic or gendered affiliations or boundaries (Held, 2010; Scheffler, 1999; Beitz, 1994; Hall, 1992). Cosmopolitanism also encourages reasoning "from the point of view of others [in order to] expand one's own framework of meaning and prejudice" (Held, 2010, p. 110), an idea analogous to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refers to in *The Post-Colonial Critic* as unlearning of one's privilege—"Not only does one become able to listen to that other constituency, but one learns to speak in such a way that one will be taken seriously by that other constituency" (Harasym, 1990, p. 42). Culturally speaking, particularly with regard to the politics of identity, cosmopolitanism, like postmodernism, does deserve a celebration. However, also like postmodernism, the concept can be "darkening and growing more opaque" (Jameson, 1998, p. 57) when the economic is slipped into the picture. As pointed out by David Held (2010) in *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities*, "Cosmopolitan international politics has developed few, if any, systematic means to address forms of economic domination. Its conceptual resources and leading ideas do not suggest or push towards the pursuit of self-determination and autonomy in the economic domain" (p. 58). The result, therefore, like what Cevalco (2004) points out, is the baleful "massified sameness" (p. 102).

Perhaps it is justified, therefore, for cultural critics like James M Glass (1993) and Terry Eagleton (1996), among others, to criticise postmodernism not only for failing to recognise that identity, for many, is experienced in a painful way,

but also for not taking into account the multiple forms of oppressions experienced by a multitude of 'selves' all over the world. It is also understandable why postmodernism and feminism are not a match made in heaven, why feminists are quite suspicious of the identity concept 'marketed' by postmodernism, as questioned by Nancy Hartsock (1990) in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, "Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic?" (p. 171). The answer to Hartsock's question, or rather frustration, I believe, can be found, partly, in Tania Modleski's comment regarding the 'privilege' of the identity politics promised by postmodernism, as she states—"Only those who have a sense of identity can play at not having it" (1991, cited in Thornham, 2005, p. 30), and partly in Cornel West's (1993b) view of 'inclusion', or rather 'semi-inclusion', of the postmodern culture—"Salutary yet it benefits principally those included" (p. 42). For those who do not have one to begin with, or who are never included, like the young and black female characters in this study, the sense of loss, as well as various wounds as examined in Chapter 2, is inescapable, perpetual, psychologically and linguistically devastating. For these youngsters, identity—be it physical, psychological, cultural, historical or linguistic—is constructed in relation to the norms of the dominant others: "Can't you see Precious is beautiful chile like white chile in magazines or on toilet paper wrappers. Precious is a blue-eye skinny chile whose hair is long braids, long long braids" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 64); "The English folk look at us with their mouths wide

open, as if they'd like to catch flies, as if they ain't—*haven't*—never seen no girls marching before” (Davis, 2009, p. 166, my italics). Reflecting on Morrison's (1989) words regarding the trauma of racism, what these characters go through clearly reveals her “severe fragmentation of the self” (p. 214), which, I firmly believe, is not ‘fragmentary’ or ‘fragmented’ in a celebratory, postmodern sense. Rather, it is ‘fragmentary’ as in nothingness, insignificance, obliteration—as in “I wanna die I hate myself HATE myself” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 39). It is through Morrison's (1989) notion of severely fragmented self and her ‘reconstructed history’, which will be discussed below, that I approach the concept of identity in my study, for it helps capture the essence of being young and female, and above all ‘black’, in contemporary America. The ‘self’ employed in this study, therefore, is one with active agency, built on or unsevered from cultural and historical foundation. How one exercises or asserts one's agency in contemporary racialised America and what determines or (de)limits children's and young adults' sense of agency will be fully explored in Chapter 5.

In *Push*, Sapphire (1996) thus puts present-day identity politics to the test, making visible Gounari's and Macedo's (2009) “no obvious markers of identity” (p. 41) or invisibility as a result of a (forced) subscription to the dominant tongue or the “colorless or odorless sterilized code” (p. 41). Her portrayal is implicitly embedded in the protagonist's anguish over the means of assessment employed by educational institutions—“The tesses paint a picture of me wif no brain. The tesses paint a picture of me an' my muver—my whole family, we more than dumb, we invisible” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 30). These standardised,

English-only tests, argue Gounari and Macedo (2009), cannot characterise “the ambivalence of our fractured cultural soul yearning to make meaning out of a bittersweet existence in the undemocratic requirement that in order to be in our democratic society, one must assimilate” (p. 34); and they obviously cannot/should not be used to measure one’s success if it means leaving behind “one’s culture and one’s language so they can be frozen in time and space” (p. 34). Whilst the country’s national discourse is filled with multiculturalism and multicultural education (a phenomenon known among CRT advocates as *Interest Convergence*, a tenet that will be fully explored in Chapter 4), its expression, ironically, can be done solely through monolingualism or “a common language” (Gounari and Macedo, 2009, p. 38), specifically standard American English. Considering how fundamental language is to cultural identity, it is quite startling, as suggested by Walt Wolfram (2010), that the US multicultural education has alienated the study of linguistic diversity. The imposition of English as the only means of communication, contend Gounari and Macedo (2009), can lead to the “tongue-tying of America” (p. 41), robbing minorities of self-expressions through their own languages, “Which is like stealing one’s history, one’s culture, one’s own life” (p. 42). This, obviously, is an instance that, as acknowledged by Iain Hamilton Grant (2005) in his criticism of postmodernism and its politics, needs “a basic commitment to enforcing certain laws and rights against those who are different” (p. 15). When racism becomes institutionalised, “The tesses paint a picture of me an’ my muver—my whole family, we more than dumb, we invisible” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 30), it is vital that the marginalised can seek refuge in the legal protection, which is principally the

reason CRT comes into existence since the first place. Postmodernism and its *petit récit* promises, however, as suggested by Grant (2005) tend to focus more on “short-term single-issue politics [thus] the very real large-scale political structures that govern our everyday lives are disregarded and left uncontested to the enemy” (p. 15). This, evidently, is where CRT and Postmodernism part company, and why CRT, if I may, is a better candidate for the analysis and interpretation of the current project regarding racial issues fictionally represented by young American Blacks.

“Day in and day out Kinjari eyes me, staring like he sees the sun rising in my eyes. I want to ask him why he looks at me that way. Am I something so beautiful he can’t help but stare?” (Flake, 1998, p. 26), writes Maleeka Madison, *The Skin I’m In’s* protagonist, in her diary. Her thoroughly *cleaned* prose discloses how her private space and imagination have been invaded by the dominant tongue; how it disconnects her from her true self and turns her into someone unrecognisable—Akeelma. Rich (1971), in “The Burning of Paper”, salutes Frederick Douglass, a black abolitionist known for his dazzling oratory and incisive antislavery writing, for his superb command of the oppressor’s language, as she pens—“Frederick Douglass wrote an English purer than Milton’s” (p. 18). Douglass’s flawless or “purer” prose, evidently, is intended to prove how capable black writers could be, and to provide, as suggested by Tyson (2006), “a powerful argument against the racist assumption of African inferiority” (p. 363). Maleeka’s, however, is that of someone robbed of her linguistic expression, as she feels disconnected and incapable of self-identifying

with both her writing and her own root. The invented Akeelma, thus, is a result of that linguistic disconnection, of “African inferiority”. Her narrative on slave trade and the Middle Passage, however unblemished, falls short of its historical meaning.

In her interview regarding her 1988’s Pulitzer Prize winning *Beloved*, Toni Morrison, in Taylor-Guthrie (1994), describes *Beloved* both as a spirit returning from the dead and a child witnessing and surviving the horror of the Middle Passage, which results in the baby’s broken and “traumatized language” (p. 247). Morrison believes that “the language of both experiences—death and the Middle Passage—is the same” (p. 247). And by conjuring up the spiritual world and the terror of the slave voyage across the Atlantic, its purpose, states Morrison, is to make “history possible” (p. 249). For Morrison and most of her novels, history always plays a crucial part. As she points out in “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation”, a strong and conscious historical connection is what constitutes individual’s and community’s well-being—“Nice things don’t always happen to the totally self-reliant if there is no conscious historical connection” (Morrison, 1984, p. 344). History for her is not about a master narrative that comes equipped with a predictable and determined conclusion. Rather, as suggested by Nancy J Peterson (1997) in her discussion of Toni Morrison’s reconstruction of African-American history in *Jazz*, it is about individuals who are not part of a “monumental history” (p. 209), whose lives “are much more chaotic, contradictory, and unpredictable—which creates a necessary space for resistance, agency and counternarratives” (p. 209).

Through these 'outside of the grand narrative' individuals, comments Peterson (1997), Morrison is able to "(re)construct a history that remains faithful to the past but is not predetermined" (p. 209). Morrison's treatment of history suggests that "history is first of all a story—a set of stories African-Americans need to tell and retell in order to create the foundation for a livable life and a viable future" (p. 215) and that "historical understanding must be dynamic and constantly reworked if it is to be useful" (p. 215). It is through this type of historical approach, I believe, that makes Morrison and her works widely accepted among postmodernists. For postmodernism, as suggested by Eagleton (1996), often views history as "a matter of constant mutability, exhilaratingly multiple and open-ended, a set of conjunctures or discontinuities" (p. 46). Our complex history, states Kevin Hart (2004), is routinely presented by postmodernists as a "montage instead of a linear narrative" (p. 72), with a whole century being reduced to "scraps and jottings" (p. 72). However, Morrison's treatment of history, I believe, is not in the same vein as that proposed by postmodernists. Although she approaches it from the everyday lives of ordinary blacks, from small and local narratives, she does it without downplaying the significance of history itself. Postmodernism, on the other hand, tends to view all histories as stories that can be rewritten to challenge dominant, 'grand' narratives without much regard to evidence, accuracy, validation and historical referent (Ward, 2010; Eagleton, 1996; Jameson, 1991). It is this loss of historical awareness or a sense of history, or what Fredric Jameson (1991) refers to as the waning of affect, that makes everything regarding history and contemporary society seem lightweight or 'depthless',

that puts us in a 'perpetual present' where, states Jameson (1998), "Our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past" (p. 20), which results, inescapably, in our "historical amnesia" (p. 20). Morrison's, though rewritten or reconstructed from a point of view of a previously neglected group, "Remains faithful to the past" (Peterson, 1997, p. 209), retains a strong and "conscious historical connection" (Morrison, 1984, p. 344). From Morrison's notion of history, Maleeka's narrative, therefore, is deprived of its historical significance, and is naively (or perversely) replaced instead by an unlikely teenage romance—"Am I something so beautiful he can't help but stare?" (Flake, 1995, p. 26). Maleeka's ignorance of the black history, though partially her own, is, for the most part, attributed to her acculturation to both racist and linguistic ideologies, where her stories and her history are made insignificant or non-existent, and her language deemed inferior. As suggested by Morrison (1981, cited in Taylor-Guthrie, 1994), "It is terrible to think that a child with five different present tenses comes to school to be faced with those books that are less than his own language. And then to be told things about his language, which is him, that are sometimes permanently damaging" (pp. 123-4). To have lived in a society where her own tongue is constantly condemned, 'permanent damage' has already been done, and Maleeka is made to witness her own selfhood being transformed and dehistoricised. From a postmodern view of history, however, having substance substituted for by triviality in her narrative is perhaps something to be expected. Any justification, therefore, seems unnecessary—"Don't nobody talk like that for real" (Flake, 1998, p. 27).

The issue of 'erased' history is also raised by Davis (2009) through her young character Ocatvia, a narrator of *Mare's War's* present-day America (NOW). Mulling over the missing chapters of American history, Octavia wonders why she has never been informed about African American women taking part in World War II—"Shouldn't other people, or at least history books, have something to say about African American women who went overseas? (...) Shouldn't people tell you about history?" (p. 147). Some history, as she is being reminded by Mare, the narrator of the book's THEN, "isn't as nice and neat as talking about being the 'greatest generation' that won the war" (p. 148). Discussing Women's Army Corps during WW II or putting them in the history book would mean digging up the shameful racial segregation chapter that America is willing to sacrifice or bury in order to attain its current 'racelessness' status, perhaps something that should be avoided—"For some folks, it's just stirring up bad memories" (p. 148). In its so-called post-racial, linguistic-assimilation era, it is quite apparent whose 'bad memories' America dreads stirring up. Yet as discussed in Chapter 2, race, contends Bernard (2011), is real and very much part of the current American landscape, "For all of its drawbacks, race is, indeed, the story of where we come from, and how we still live" (p. 14). Unfortunately, it tends to get swept under the 'colour-blindness, racelessness, and classlessness' carpet, thus making American history incomplete and void. As observed by one of the characters in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2013) new take on the present reality of race in America, *Americanah*, "Because this is America. You're supposed to pretend that you don't notice certain things" (p. 127).

It is seemingly through this line of logic that deters postmodernists from putting their trust in the 'monumental history' of the grand narrative, as they believe it is never disinterested, and tends to serve, for the most part, specific interests, particularly of those in power or control (Ward, 2010; Lyotard, 1984). By doing so, however, the significance of history and its objective facts tend to get downplayed and compromised, resulting, unfortunately, as suggested by Jameson (1998), in its rewritten pages being lightweight and depthless, as discussed above. Through Morrison's notion of history, however, its reconstructed pages still remain faithful to the past, yet are made 'livable' and 'viable' by those previously neglected, creating, as a result, "a necessary space for resistance, agency and counternarratives" (Peterson, 1997, p. 209). It is through Morrison's sense of history, as opposed to that proposed by postmodernists, I believe, that makes Octavia's questioning of historical absences of particularly black female figures and the reading of *Mare's War* suddenly become more relevant and meaningful in contemporary America. For it helps disclose not only America's unfair treatment of its plural histories, but also, as expressed by Jameson (1998), its obsession with 'perpetual present', its ability to relegate "recently historical experiences as rapidly as possible into the past" (p. 20), without much regard to its historically, linguistically, and multi-ethnically diverse reality (Wolfram 2010; Gounari and Macedo, 2009). By validating Mare's story and existence in a text, though fictionally constructed, Davis's (2009) *Mare's War*, therefore, helps the reader realise the missing chapter of American history, thus making fictional works, as argued by Wilkie-

Stibbs (2008), Morrison (1998) and West (1993b), as discussed in 3.2 above, valuable and valid as world-affiliated cultural objects (Said, 1988).

A current debate regarding the necessity to have a national museum of African American History and Culture in the US capital is a good example demonstrating why African American history, as well as that of other ethnic minorities, should be part of the American history. As suggested by the museum director Mr Lonnie Bunch, it is after all “the quintessential American story” (O’Brien, 2013). Mr Bunch, however, can fathom why some might express their concerns that this could contribute to the culture of segregation and why, as commented by Virginia Congressman Jim Moran, it is not “what America is all about” (O’Brien, 2013). “Part of the challenge for Americans”, states Mr Bunch in his BBC interview, “is that we’ve framed ourselves as the good guys (...) So it’s hard to say that this is a story where some of us are culpable. Wrestling with that is a painful thing” (O’Brien, 2013). His comment clearly reflects the view put forward by young adult author Tanita S Davis (2009) through her main character Mare mentioned in the previous paragraph, “Talking about segregation isn’t as nice and neat as talking about being the ‘greatest nation’ that won the war” (p. 148). However, as suggested by Leslie Hinkson, an assistant professor of sociology at Georgetown University, the existence of a national museum of African American history is just as valid as that of other museums, “Until black history becomes properly woven into the story of America as opposed to stitched on at the fringes, then it’s necessary” (O’Brien, 2013). And part of that ‘properly woven’ history, as insisted by hooks (1994a)

in *Outlaw Culture*, should not be dictated or dominated by only a few good (black) men, but individuals, including particularly females, who are not part of or never made part of the 'monumental history', as discussed by Morrison and children's and young adult authors chosen for this study. It is legitimate, therefore, for Davis (2009) to pen *Mare's War* (2009) entirely in the present tense—to prove, I believe, not only how relevant the subject is, but also how dehistoricised America has become. As suitably worded by Rich (1971), "In America we have only the present tense. I am in danger. You are in danger" (p. 18). The oppressor's language and its ability to deny one of historical meaning, evidently, still continues posing its many dangers, as well as enjoying its many privileges.

3.5 Final Words

Through CRT's *Social Construction of Race*, *Differential Racialisation*, and *Everyday Racism* tenets, this chapter delineates the detrimental effects of oppressive language in contemporary racialised America. As illustrated by the young female characters from the focus texts, it describes how linguistic violence is committed, how the knowledge is limited, resulting in the tongue being 'de-coloured', damaging both the self and the black community at large. Being made to adhere to the dominant linguistic code, as these texts seem to suggest, can lead these fictionalised vulnerable females to being not only linguistically crippled but also historically deprived. My key argument is premised on the fact that since the dawn of Western Imperialism, language has

always been part and parcel of the tool used to perform the work of racial othering (Ashcroft, 2001). The act of violence committed that these young and black characters have been made to endure, be it linguistic or historical, as I have argued, has inevitably led to their 'selves' being violated, shattered, and ultimately erased. My discussion and theoretical positioning of the notion of 'self', particularly in relation to the current terrain of postmodernism and capitalist globalisation, leans more towards Toni Morrison's theorisation of African American identity politics, one equipped with historical meaning and significance, as opposed to that favoured by postmodernists, or what Eva Hoffman (1999) refers to as "sexy, glamorous, interesting" (p. 44).

Based upon Morrison (1998)'s thesis on the importance of fiction and its blend of facts and imagination, I have also argued in this chapter that these children's and young adult texts, though fictionally constructed, distinctly make visible the inner psychological and linguistic wounds or what she refers to as "the unwritten interior life" (p. 192) of those haunted by internalised racism. The texts themselves are also dynamic, complex, multi-layered, offering, through authoritative narrators and authorial voices and viewpoints, realistic accounts of what it is like to be young and black and female in contemporary America (see further discussion of children's and young adult literature and its place in critical literary studies in Chapters 4 and 5).

In *Decolonising the Mind*, wa Thiong'o (1986) describes two processes of mental colonisation deployed by the colonising nations, which are "the destruction or

the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, *history*, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the *language* of the coloniser" (p. 16, my italics). These two processes are fittingly translated by children's and young adult authors mentioned in this chapter through their young female protagonists. With no history to fall back on and no language to convey their inner thoughts, these characters are left tongue-tied and dehistoricised. As pointed out by an influential Brazilian theorist of critical pedagogy Paulo Freire (1985, quoted in Gounari and Macedo, 2009), "No individual or social, cultural, or ethnic groups can start the struggle for self-affirmation without the use of their native language" (p. 44). In our current global space where an ideal "decentering and a proliferation of differences" (Jameson, 1991, p. 66) are now being compromised or even destroyed by massification, commodification, and forced integration, traditional cultural systems, or what Jameson (1998) refers to as "a seamless web of habits and habitual practices" (p. 63), which include language and history, can be easily shattered, and "once destroyed, those fabrics can never be recreated" (p. 63). What we have left, as a consequence, is—to reflect on West (1993b)'s analysis of a postmodern culture—"Eliot's modernist wasteland of futility and anarchy and Poe's modern chamber of horrors" (p. 43).

CHAPTER 4

DISPLACED/DISLOCATED: Political Changes and Internalised Racism

4.1 Introduction

Twenty, thirty years from now, he thought, all sorts of people will claim pivotal, controlling, defining positions in the rights movement. A few would be justified. Most would be frauds. What could not be gainsaid, but would remain invisible in the newspapers and the books he bought for his students, were the ordinary folk (...) Yes, twenty, thirty years from now, those people will be dead or forgotten, their small stories part of no grand record or even its footnotes, although they were the ones who formed the spine on which the televised ones stood.

—Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (1997, p. 212)

The year 2013 marked the 50th anniversary of one of the most significant historical moments in American history—*The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom*. President Barack Obama, speaking from the Lincoln Memorial on 28 August 2013, echoed Martin Luther King’s ‘I Have a Dream’ Speech, praising his vision, honouring his legacy, stressing how ‘far’ America has come, as a result of those marching, taking part in the civil rights movement. The movement, however politically and historically consequential, as suggested in the excerpt taken from Toni Morrison’s (1997) *Paradise* above, is often remembered for its ‘grand record’, for its leading (male) figures (e.g. Martin Luther King, Jr, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, etc.), for its victories (e.g. *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Twenty-Fourth Amendment, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the elimination of Jim Crow Segregation, etc.). Its small narratives of ordinary folks who ‘formed the spine on which the televised ones stood’ are often forgotten or neglected. As portrayed in Morrison’s (1997) *Paradise*, it is rarely about “the grandmother

who kept all the babies so the mothers could march” (p. 212); or “the young who spread their arms wide to protect the old from batons they could not possibly survive” (p. 212); or “parents who wiped the spit and tears from their children’s faces and said, “Never mind, honey. Never you mind. You are not and never will be a nigger, a coon, a jig, a jungle bunny nor any other things white folks teach their children to say” (p. 212). The civil rights movement is indeed grand and visibly male. Its grand narrative, however, as will be discussed later in the chapter, is aimed chiefly at dismantling overtly racist political practices and social divisions, ignoring or failing to take into account that “race, racism and racialisation are not always fully intentional acts or processes but by-products of a society with a particular history and culture” (Schur, 2004, p. 297), leaving, as a result, racism and its many faces still thriving today, particularly the issue investigated in this study. Anything psychological, unfortunately, has hardly taken centre stage in American politics. It tends to get shoved into the hand of suffering individuals as their own psychological flaws.

Through the eye of the young characters from Jacqueline Woodson’s (2007) Newbery Honour *Feathers*, as well as her 1994’s Coretta Scott King Honour *I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This*, and catalysed by Morrison’s (1997) *Paradise*, this chapter intends to capture post-civil rights desegregated America and delineate the new set of challenges and problems facing American Blacks, particularly the young and vulnerable, growing up in a society where overt racist policies have been made outlawed. Thematically, *Feathers* and *I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This* deal with different subject matters. Whilst the former, set in the seventies,

explores the direct aftermath of desegregated America, as well as challenges and questions political and legal victories of the previous decades, the latter, set in the nineties, turns its gaze to the issue of child abuse and incest. Both, however, unveil detrimental effects of living in completely segregated towns through the eye of their young characters. Yet, as this chapter's main concern is political and legal changes and their subsequent cultural and psychological effects, the weight, as well as literary examples, is therefore given more to the former novel. Drawing also on parallel painful, disorienting experiences regarding those living an exile life as proposed by Said (2000) and Kristeva (1991), this chapter displays and highlights, through Woodson's young fictional characters, what it is like to be 'home and exiled'.

Through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), particularly its *Interest Convergence* tenet, however, some of the successes enjoyed by the civil rights movement are given an entirely different interpretation, one that perhaps better explains why the focused issue of this study, internalised racism, as well as idealised whiteness, still remains, and what should be done if America is ever going to actualise its post-racial status. This different interpretation also confirms the very idea of 'legal indeterminacy' widely acknowledged within the CRT framework, asserting that "not every legal case has one correct outcome" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 5). Also, as the main texts used in this chapter—*Feathers* and *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*—are intended for young(er) readers, their treatments of political issues through optimism and

utopian paradigm are discussed to provide a better picture of the nature of children's and young adult literature and its poetics.

Following are key sections detailing why one is left displaced and dislocated: (i) *Across the Highway*, providing important background knowledge regarding both the texts used and the characters' displaced and dislocated feelings; (ii) *Brown, CRT and the Re-Re-Re-Emergence of the Dolls*, discussing major political changes in the fifties and sixties, particularly in relation to the historic 1954 legal case *Brown v. Board of Education*, including its CRT interpretation; (iii) "*They Shoot the White Girl First*": *Whiteness Idealised and Physical and Psychological Displacement*, analysing and examining, through literary characters in Woodson's (2007) *Feathers* and her 1994's *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This* and Morrison's (1997) *Paradise*, fictional representations of political and structural defects and their effects on the characters' physical and psychological well-beings, particularly the feelings of displacement and dislocation, based on the exile experience, including also in its discussion is the idea of optimism and utopian paradigm typically found in children's literature; and (iv) *Final Words*, providing a brief summary of the chapter.

4.2 Across the Highway

Through Emily Dickinson's enduring line—*Hope is the thing with feathers*, Jacqueline Woodson's (2007) Newbery Honour *Feathers* unfolds its post-civil rights narrative in a hopeful note. Set against the backdrop of America in the

early seventies, *Feathers* explores, through the eye of a sixth-grader Frannie Wright, the life of young American Blacks growing up in a world where formal racist barriers and practices have been legally dismantled—"It's the nineteen seventies. Not the fifties. There's no more segregation, remember?" (p. 11). When everyone's mind is charged with the decade's powerful and ubiquitous message, BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL, America in the seventies, for African Americans, looks indeed promising—"So maybe the seventies is the thing with feathers. Maybe it was about hope and moving forward and not looking behind you" (p. 3). Yet, for the young and black female protagonist Frannie Wright and her brother Sean, as well as other black kids in their neighbourhood, there seems to be something 'missing' with life on their side of the highway, something that leaves them displaced and dislocated, "There weren't white people on this side of the highway (...) you saw all the brown and light brown everywhere" (p. 16). Two decades later, unfortunately, as fictionally portrayed in her 1994's Coretta Scott King Honour *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*, desegregated America is still not fully realised, as Chauncey, Ohio, is still visibly segregated, leaving its twelve-year-old main character Marie still very much displaced, "Sometimes I feel like Alice in Wonderland whirling through darkness" (p. 1). Therefore, Frannie and Sean, like other black kids on their side of the highway, long to be the first to cross to the other side, to be on the 'white' side of town—"Seems kids on this side of the highway were always trying to figure out ways to fly and run and cross over things and...get free or something (...) Everybody seemed to be thinking about some other place" (Woodson, 2007, p. 21).

With the arrival of a new white kid at Price School, which is made up entirely of black pupils, “Stepped through that door white and softly as the snow” (Woodson, 2007, p. 1), Frannie’s curiosity, as well as that of others, about life across the highway intensifies, and she cannot help wondering “what a kid like that was doing in our school—with that long, curly hair and white skin and all” (Woodson, 2007, p. 2). With his calm and quiet demeanour and his prophetic way of speaking, the new kid, before long, has come to be known as ‘Jesus Boy’ and literally viewed by some Price School pupils, particularly Frannie’s devout friend Samantha, as a miracle worker, “If there was a world for Jesus to need to walk back into, wouldn’t this one be it?” (Woodson, 2007, p. 33). Tensions and frictions arise at Price School as students question the arrival of Jesus Boy, simply because they view their side of the highway as a god-forsaken place, “If he was really God’s son, he’d probably go to a private school” (Woodson, 2007, p. 25). Unfortunately, the students at Price School are left disappointed, even devastated for some, as Jesus Boy ultimately turns out to be just another ordinary boy, the very minute he gets into a fight with Trevor, a school bully.

Through legal proceedings and political campaigns that had been ceaselessly carried out by the civil rights movement in the previous decades, America in the seventies no longer witnesses segregation. Yet, life in a society where formal racist practices have been outlawed poses a new set of challenges, namely cultural and psychological, as one, particularly the young and vulnerable, as seen in the novel chosen for this chapter, is struggling to come to terms with the new meaning of the American racial landscape in the post-civil rights era. As

suggested by Mutua (2010), whilst the civil rights movement is often honoured for its attempt to champion civil and political rights of African Americans, “Its agenda for economic, *social and cultural rights* (...) went unfinished” (p. 276, my italics). With the racist barriers being legally lifted, as stated by Richard L Schur (2004) in his critical study of Toni Morrison’s (1997) *Paradise*, an historical novel set also amidst the dawn of America’s desegregation, “The battle must now turn to the psychic and cultural effects of race. For the power of race as an organizing force in social relations and as a psychic wound remains” (p. 289). Whilst the inhabitants of Ruby, an isolated black town in Morrison’s (1997) *Paradise*, resort to self-imposed isolation as a survival strategy, which results, unfortunately, in their own subsequent demise, Frannie and her peers in Woodson’s (2007) *Feathers* seem to long for integration, as they endlessly wonder what life would be like on the other side of the highway. Whether isolation or integration, one thing is certain—both Morrison’s fictional town Ruby and Woodson’s ‘this side of the highway’ seem to be haunted or invaded by racist ideologies and idealised whiteness. The people of Ruby, by choosing isolation, still end up killing each other even without any white presence, as echoed by one of its female characters Connie, “Scary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside” (Morrison, 1997, p. 39); Frannie and her peers, constantly feeling displaced and yearning to be on the other side, equate white with virtue and purity, elevating the status of the new comer to that of the “God’s son” (Woodson, 2007, p. 25), which, once again, resonates what Frantz Fanon (1967) uttered almost 5 decades ago in his discussion of “The Fact of Blackness”, as he states, “Sin is Negro as virtue is white” (p. 106). What seems to

be left intact at its very foundations, impenetrable by legal victories of the day, is clearly whiteness idealised, as exemplified by both adult and children's books cited above. And with that, both the Ruby residents and Price students, in their attempts to navigate their new lives at the dawn of desegregated America, end up feeling displaced, (physically) and psychologically wounded. A thorough analysis of the racist ideologies and idealised whiteness in relation to both physical and psychological displacements as appeared in the focus texts will be discussed in 4.4 below.

As the displaced/dislocated feelings experienced by the young characters chosen for this chapter are directly influenced by and intertwined with the matter of legal actions and political activism, a brief outline of political and legal gains and losses America has seen since the mid 20th century is called for, particularly the historic 1954 legal case *Brown v. Board of Education*, as its victorious claim was premised exclusively on the fact that segregation damaged African American children's self-esteem (Freeman, 2009). Through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), however, particularly its *Interest Convergence* tenet, *Brown's* victory painted an entirely different picture of the American racial landscape, as will be discussed in the following section.

4.3 *Brown*, CRT and the Re-Re-Re-Emergence of the Dolls

And because they kept marching, America changed. Because they marched, the civil rights law was passed. Because they marched, the voting rights law was signed. Because they marched, doors of opportunity and education swung open so their daughters and sons could finally imagine a life for themselves beyond washing somebody else's laundry or shining somebody else's shoes. Because they marched, city councils changed and state legislatures changed and Congress changed and, yes, eventually the White House changed.

—US President Barack Obama, Lincoln Memorial, 28 August 2013.

It was 28 August 1963 when Martin Luther King's immortal "I Have a Dream" Speech was delivered at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C.—to call for an end to racism plaguing the United States for centuries. America has since seen a number of great changes, politically and legally, particularly in relation to the life of African Americans, as shown in the above excerpt. The biggest of all seems to be its recent phenomenon—an African American presence in the White House. Whilst part of Dr King's dreams was to witness his four children "not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character" (BBC, 2003), the US President Barack Obama, speaking also at the Lincoln Memorial, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 1963 March and the Speech, echoes Dr King's vision with America's achievements over the five passing decades, "Because they marched, doors of opportunity and education swung open so their daughters and sons could finally imagine a life for themselves beyond washing somebody else's laundry or shining somebody else's shoes" (Washington Post, 2013). America has indeed come very far. With such progress made in law and politics, has America now seen itself truly living in a post-racial era? Is racism a thing of the past? Are such widely-used, politically-correct terms that have become part of contemporary American racial politics as "racelessness, colourblindness, colourless or odourless sterilized code, multiculturalism" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Bernard, 2011; Gounari and Macedo, 2009) true representations of America today?

As stated by Alana Lentin (2008), “Racism is a political phenomenon. To analyze racism (...) we must look at how certain political conditions during particular historical contexts led to some of the ideas proposed by racial theorists being integrated into the political practices of nation-states” (p. 1). Following Lentin’s (2008) notion of racism and its relation to politics, in this section I would like to explore political activism in America since the early fifties, particularly its momentous 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* legal case, to find out its political motivations, its relations to the ongoing existence of racism and its many manifestations. Has the legal victory of such monumental scale as that won by *Brown* made much of a difference regarding Dr King’s initial call to end racism? Has it brought on any change, if any, regarding the psychic and cultural side of race?

The 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* to end legal racist practices of ‘separate but equal’ policy (*Plessy v. Ferguson*) that had haunted African American psyches since 1896, marked a critical historical moment regarding racial segregation in the United States. The court decision was based on the fact that legal racist practices such as those found in *Plessy* had damaged African American children’s self-esteem. The court supported its decision by citing a report by an assistant professor of psychology at City University of New York Kenneth Clark and his wife Mamie, who conducted the quantitative racial preference tests using black and white dolls to assess children’s racial identification. Since white dolls were chosen, treated and assigned positive traits by the majority of African American children

participating the research project, the researchers interpreted children's preference for white over black dolls as racial self-hatred, concluding that these children had suffered from the internalisation of the racist messages widely circulated in the American society (Clark and Clark 1939, 1952). Toni Morrison's (1999) *The Bluest Eye*, as previously discussed in Chapter 2 in connection with psychological manifestations of internalised racism, is a compelling fictional representation of such a racist society and its resultant harm on both the body and mind of young African Americans. Given the credibility of the Clarks' study back then, *Brown*, therefore, as suggested by Gwen Bergner (2009) in her study of black children and the politics of self-esteem, "Established a discursive link between educational achievement and self-esteem for African Americans" (p. 299). Even though they were invalidated later on for their methodological and statistical flaws, particularly in the sixties and seventies when the Black Power movements were on the rise, the Clarks' studies seemed to set a framework for all succeeding studies on racial identity, self-esteem and child development (Pyke, 2010; Bergner, 2009). From a political standpoint, regardless of the validity of the test results, however, Clark's importance in *Brown*, as suggested by Bergner (2009), "Was likely due to the key role he played in executing the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)'s social science strategy rather than the strength of his research" (p. 306).

The influence of the Black Power movement in the sixties and seventies, with its rigorous black pride campaigns, had immensely shifted the tie of the Clarks'

research and the whole black self-hatred paradigm, as reflected in the decade's powerful message—BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL. African Americans started to take so much pride in their own beautiful skin, as also depicted by Woodson (2007) through her young characters in *Feathers*, "He [Rayray] was wearing this big shirt that said BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL with a black hand making a Black Power fist underneath the word" (p. 24). At once, the influential study came heavily under attack and was labelled biased and fundamentally Eurocentric (Pyke, 2010; Bergner, 2009; Baldwin, 1979). Critics of the time argued, as suggested by Bergner (2009), that the Clarks' research "ignored the cultural richness and support systems within African American communities and the history of strategies African Americans had used to survive centuries of slavery, segregation, and discrimination" (p. 310). The doll tests were then reintroduced, this time with the Black Power movement as a political backdrop. The '60s and '70 test results, therefore, saw higher rates of black preference behaviour among African American children, which were said to be a direct result of the black consciousness campaign. The Black Power movement made it possible, as suggested by hooks (1994a), for black people to have an ongoing public discourse about the detrimental impact of internalised racism.

In the late 1980's, America once again saw an emergence of the doll test, this time in the service of multiculturalism, particularly multicultural school curriculum (Wun, 2012; Bergner, 2009; Jay, 2003; Nieto, 2000). The move then was driven or legitimately assisted by two studies, also employing the Clarks' methods, conducted by Sharon-Ann Gopaul-McNicol (1988) and Darlene

Powell-Hopson and Derek Hopson (1988). The results of both studies were similar to those of Clarks, suggesting that black children internalised the society's racist images that were harmful to their self-esteem. Consequently, they called for multicultural education in order to promote self-esteem and self-acceptance in black children (Gopaul-McNicol, 1988; Powell-Hopson and Hopson, 1988). Multicultural education, as suggested by its advocates, "Challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect (...) multicultural education promotes democratic principles of social justice (Nieto, 2000, p. 305). Powell-Hopson and Hopson (1988) suggested that a multicultural curriculum would introduce positive role models and instil racial pride, which would, in turn, enhance self-esteem and lead to greater academic achievement. However, since its inception, multiculturalism has been criticised by various groups in the society, including critical race theorists, particularly those involved in education and education-oriented research, for maintaining the status quo and benefiting only whites, and for perpetuating white power and domination through its hegemonic functioning (Wun, 2012; Jay, 2003; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). The 'multicultural-only-through-monolingual-education' and English-only movements in contemporary America discussed in Chapter 3 are a case in point, illustrating the extensive harm brought on by multicultural education and multiculturalism (Gounari and Macedo, 2009). The discussion of CRT's *Interest Convergence* tenet below will shed more light on how white interests, benefits and power are

maintained.

In the early 1990's, however, social policies such as affirmative action, school integration and multicultural education had come under attack by neoconservative black American intellectuals. Such policies were viewed as compromising or impairing both professional and intellectual abilities of African Americans (Cose, 1993; Carter, 1991; Steele, 1990). Even though the doll tests and the self-esteem research still live on well into the late 1990's and early 2000's, the findings suggest that racial preference is not an indicator of self-esteem. These recent studies conceptualise racial identity as more complex and multifaceted than did earlier research models (Miville et al., 2005; Rowley et al., 1998). The politics of identity, particularly in its current terrain of (post)postmodernism and capitalist globalisation, as extensively discussed in Chapter 3, is typically described as multiple, unstable, fluid, decentred, deterritorialised, nomadic, fragmented (Sim, 2005; Cevasco, 2004; Hart, 2004; Hoffman, 1999; Eagleton, 1996; Jameson, 1991; Deleuze and Guattari, 1972; etc.). My theoretical positioning on this, however, leans more towards Toni Morrison's theorisation of African American identity politics, one equipped with historical meaning and significance, as opposed to that favoured by (post)postmodernists, or what Eva Hoffman (1999) refers to as "sexy, glamorous, interesting" (p. 44, see detailed discussion of the identity politics in Chapter 3, Section 3.4).

The most recent re-emergence of the doll test was a 7:08-minute independent

film, *A Girl Like Me*, which came out in 2007 and was directed by 17-year-old Kiri Davis. Young Davis (2007) decided to re-conduct the doll test in her film, hoping to “shed new light on how society affects black children today and how little has actually changed” (Media That Matters). Fifteen out of twenty one young girls in her experiment, like previous studies carried out by other social scientists, displayed white preference behaviours. At the end of the film, Jennifer, 18, gave a heart-breaking account of African American girls lost, displaced and dehistoricised in present-day, racialised America, “Everybody else in the society is throwing their ideas of what they believe we should be at us, but you know personally we know that’s not what we should be, but we’re gonna take it, because we don’t know exactly what it is that we should be, because we don’t really know where we came from” (Media That Matters, see also Chapter 2, Section 2.3.).

Since its first introduction to the American public in the fifties, the doll test keeps re-emerging throughout the passing decades, each time yielding conflicting results, depending on the political climate of the day (e.g. desegregation, black consciousness, multiculturalism, etc.). Similar to CRT’s *Social Construction of Race* and *Differential Racialisation* tenets, the results are not only socially constructed, but they are also constructed, at different times, in response to the shifting needs of their beneficiaries. Regardless of the research findings and the promotion of psychic hybridity or mixed-race identification as an effective strategy for social justice (Bergner, 2009; Pabst, 2003), what the doll test implies is that internalised racism or racial self-hatred has always been

part and parcel of African American psyches, children's in particular, waiting to resurface. The writings of both fiction and non-fiction of the passing decades by celebrated authors mentioned throughout this study are testaments to such a phenomenon (e.g. Davis, 2009; Díaz, 2008; Woodson, 2007; 1994; Flake, 2005; 1998; Walker, 2004; 1984; Morrison, 1999; 1997; Sapphire, 1996; hook, 1994; Angelou, 1984; Lorde, 1984; Brooks, 1971). These writings, as world-affiliated cultural objects, shaped and informed by cultural practices of contemporary America, (see further discussion on this topic in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.), have made it more difficult to argue that racism in America is a thing of the past, and that America has now truly seen itself living a post-racial life.

From a point of view of Critical Race Theory (CRT), however, the court decision regarding *Brown v. Board of Education* yields an entirely different picture. *Brown* was heavily criticised by the leading critical race theorist Derrick Bell as being politically motivated and manipulated. In his article entitled "*Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest Convergence Dilemma", Bell (1980) states that racism is common in America because it often converges or overlaps with the interest of the dominant group. He argues that *Brown* is not an issue of ethics but of politics, suggesting that by abandoning segregation, the court decision, first and foremost, "Helped to provide immediate credibility to America's struggle with communist countries to win the hearts and minds of emerging third world people" (p. 524). Secondly, Bell argues that with the segregation being abolished, southern whites would benefit from making "the transition from rural plantation society to the sunbelt with all its potential and

profit" (p. 524), since segregation was seen as an obstacle towards industrial developments of the American South. And thirdly, Bell argues that "*Brown* offered much needed reassurance to American blacks that the precepts of equality and freedom so heralded during World War II might yet be given meaning at home" (p. 524). Black youths returning from wars had to come face to face with discrimination and violence that were damaging, both physically and psychologically, in their own country. The image of America as a dangerous ground, as a place of wars, is movingly portrayed in both Woodson's (2007) *Feathers* and Morrison's (1997) *Paradise*. Whilst Frannie, a young protagonist of *Feathers*, is contradicting and questioning her devout friend Samantha on the arrival of Jesus Boy, "There's always a war going on somewhere (...) how come he didn't come back and stop this one all those years ago when it started" (Woodson, 2007, p. 33), Soane of *Paradise* is seeking comfort in the fact that her sons' chance of survival might be higher on the front line than at home, "Like a fool she believed her sons would be safe. Safer than anywhere in Oklahoma outside Ruby. Safer in the army than in Chicago, where Easter wanted to go. Safer than Birmingham, than Montgomery (...) She had thought war was safer than any city in the United States" (Morrison, 1997, pp. 100-101). Both Morrison and Woodson, through their young and adult female characters, highlight the fragility of African American lives, the danger of the American soil and the damage it has inflicted on American Blacks, both physically and psychologically. As suggested by Schur (2004), "The social and cultural transformations in the United States present an ideological battlefield that seems more dangerous than the snipers, landmines, and guerrilla warfare in

Vietnam" (p. 283).

Through the lens of CRT, particularly its *Interest Convergence* tenet, as discussed above, the victory of *Brown* indeed paints an entirely different story regarding American racial politics. It is perhaps valid to say that in America, as suggested by Bergner (2009), social problems tend to be viewed through the psychological rather than political lens, and the doll test, unfortunately, has made such an interpretation possible. And this very obsession with psychology, as pointed out by Ellen Herman (1995) in her book *The Romance of American Psychology*, has led the evaluation of both personal and civic duties be done only through the psychological lens. As a result, as Herman (1995) suggests, "Whether our society lives up to its reputation of democracy and equality" (pp. 1-2) has been made too abstract and irrelevant in contemporary America. The re-re-re-emergence of the doll test, therefore, is inevitable, as it, states Bergner (2009), "Represents a melodramatic tableau, blending children (the "innocent" victims of racism) and dolls (the quintessential marker of childhood fantasy)—while leaving the perpetrators invisible" (p. 323). These invisible perpetrators, according to critical race theorists, are strictly political, and they need to be treated as such if America is ever going to actualise its post-racial status. The issue of internalised racism, therefore, should never be perceived as an individual's psychological defect or weakness, but rather as a defect of the society, of the structure of racial inequality (Pyke, 2010; Lubiano, 1998;).

The following section details how political and structural defects of racial

inequality of the passing decades have been represented in children's and young adult literature, how they reflect the characters' physical and psychological well-beings, particularly the feelings of displacement and dislocation, as seen through the life of young characters of Woodson's (2007) *Feathers* and her 1994's *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*. Drawing also on parallel painful, disorienting experiences of those living an exile life, as proposed by Edward Said (2000) and Julia Kristeva (1991), these young characters display what life is like for African Americans in desegregated America, what it is like to be 'home and exiled'.

4.4 “*They Shoot the White Girl First*”: Whiteness Idealised and Physical and Psychological Displacement

How rich our mutability, how easily we change (and are changed) from one thing to another, how unstable our place—and all because of the missing foundation of our existence, the lost ground of our origin, the broken link with our land and our past.

—Edward Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (1999, p. 26)

In his essay “Reflections on Exile”, Edward Said (2000) writes, “It [exile] is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted (...) true exile is a condition of terminal loss” (p. 173). Although attempts, particularly through literary works, have been made, at different points in time, both by the exile and non-exile authors, to capture or depict exile and its experience in a positive, humanistic, or even triumphant light, these, asserts Said (2000), “Are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement” (p. 173). Literature on exile, he states, only “objectifies an anguish and a

predicament most people rarely experience first hand, but to think of the exile informing this literature as beneficially humanistic is to banalize its mutilations, the losses it inflicts on those who suffer them” (p. 174). For Said, exile is banishment: “Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider” (p. 181). He perceives it as “fundamentally a discontinuous state of being” (p. 177), and those living its “anomalous and miserable [life] are cut off from their roots, their land, their past” (p. 177). Homecoming, as a result, “is out of the question” (p. 179). As also reverberated by an Egyptian exile André Aciman in his essay “Shadow Cities” (1999), “An exile is not just someone who has lost his home; it is someone who can’t find another, who can’t think of another” (p. 21).

What Edward Said dubs ‘exile’ is Julia Kristeva’s ‘foreigner’ or ‘foreignisation’. Both conjure up the image of ‘otherness’: “Those eyes, those lips, those cheek bones, that skin unlike others, all that distinguishes him and reminds one that there is *someone* there” (Kristeva, 1991, p. 3, italics in original). Both carry the image of an intruder, are made to tolerate hatred: “Civilized people need not be gentle with foreigners. “That’s it, and if you don’t like it why don’t you go back where you came from!”” (Kristeva, 1991, p. 14). And both recall the image of one who is an “in addition”, who belongs “elsewhere (...) A lost origin, the impossibility to take root, a rummaging memory, the present in abeyance” (Kristeva, 1991, pp. 4-7). The question then, as raised by Kristeva (1991) in *Strangers to Ourselves*, which seems even more relevant today, considering mass migration and political and economic integration taking place in various

‘civilised’ corners of our contemporary global village: “Shall we be, intimately and subjectively, able to live with the others, to live *as others*, without ostracism but also without leveling?” (p. 2, italics in original).

Whilst an exile is physically ‘uprooted’ or ‘banished’ from her or his own mother country, evidently not by the “luxury of self-removal” (Mukherjee, 1999, p. 73), as that enjoyed by expatriates but extreme pressure, coercion and intimidation, sent on “a one-way ticket to oblivion” (Mukherjee, 1999, p. 73), with the image of ‘home’ forever out of reach or simply lost, the young and black characters from Woodson’s (2007) *Feathers* and her 1994’s *I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This*, as well as those from other C&YA novels chosen for this study, are placed in a different yet equally painful and unbearable situation. What these young and vulnerable literary beings experience is a sense of loss and dislocation taking place in their own home; in other words, they are ‘home and exiled’. Both involve and endure, as suggested by Eva Hoffman (1999), “Dislocation, disorientation, self-division” (p. 44). Take the physical aspect of ‘uprootedness’, of being driven out of one’s homeland, for whatever reasons, out of the equation, what remains at the core is a disturbing image of equal psychological devastation: “Disorienting loss” (Said, 2000, p. 181), “furious engagement” (Mukherjee, 1999, p. 75), and “not belonging to any place, any time, any love” (Kristeva, 1991, p. 7).

When one is psychologically uprooted, sacrifice needs to be made. Letting go of one’s own tongue in exchange of a ‘colourless sterilized code’, as greatly

discussed in Chapter 3, is one of many that one needs to make. The end result, as previously discussed, is devastating, leaving literary characters like Precious, Maleeka, Erika and Mare linguistically crippled, historically deprived and psychologically wounded. As suggested by Hoffman (1999), language is a vital part of our cultural identity. We become incoherent once we “fall out of its matrix” (p. 49), as attested to by young female characters mentioned above. Being ‘incoherent’, however, is not the only sign of physical and psychological displacement/dislocation. When one is physically and psychologically displaced, particularly in one’s own home, as portrayed by young literary characters from Woodson’s (2007) *Feathers* and her 1994’s *I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This* below, the wound is much, much deeper...

“Imagine if somebody built a bridge right outside our window and we could just walk across the highway and be on the other side” (Woodson, 2007, p. 16, italics in original), signs Sean, Frannie’s deaf brother. Both Sean and Frannie, as well as other black kids on ‘this side of the highway’, long to cross over to the other side, to explore and experience first-hand what life is like on the white side of town. When segregation is made illegal, when anything ‘black’ suddenly becomes ‘beautiful’, these youngsters are left bewildered and perhaps disoriented by the new meaning of the American racial landscape. Their bewilderment or disorientation, undeniably, stems from conflicting messages that have been circulated around them. If segregation was made outlawed, then why Price School was still segregated, why there were not any white people around, “You saw all the brown and light brown everywhere” (p. 16). Any

answer that could help them grasp the meaning of the new desegregated America, be it from school authorities or any grownups around them, seems nowhere to be found, “The first time I asked Mama about it, she said, *They (whites) don’t want to live over here*. And the way she said it made me wonder what was so wrong with our side of the highway” (p. 16, italics in original). In *I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This*, it is even insinuated by the author, through her young characters, that adult figures themselves might play a crucial role in perpetuating this ongoing segregation: “But he say if God wanted us to mix, he would’ve made us all one color” (Woodson, 1994, p. 41); “White people can walk back and forth through this world all they want, but we don’t have to be friends with them” (Woodson, 1994, p. 68). Their innocent claims or pleas depicted in both novels—“It’s the nineteen seventies. Not the fifties. There’s no more segregation, remember?” (Woodson, 2007, p. 11); “This is the nineties. Things are changing” (Woodson, 1994, p. 69)—seem irrelevant or even futile. These young characters, therefore, are left to come up with their own meanings of what life is like for American blacks after desegregation.

Whilst America in the seventies, with its recent landmark legal victory as that enjoyed by *Brown* and its effective black pride campaigns, sees itself on a high note, particularly for its black inhabitants, the ‘enemy’ within, impregnable by such political successes, is still lurking, ready to strike. It is there, has always been, in the black landscape, securely burying itself deep in the black psyches, “We had the Price School, where I went—Mama said we could make-believe it was named for Leontyne Price, the black opera singer, but it’s really named for

Major Price, the white mayor from a long time ago” (Woodson, 2007, p. 18). Frannie’s brief description of the history of her Price School, though her young mind was unaware of its historical significance and cultural ramification, accurately captures what lies underneath, at its very core. And it is precisely this very reason, I believe, that makes the opening line of Morrison’s (1997) *Paradise* sound rather disturbing, even horrifying, as if resorting to the act of violence is a legitimate option, “They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out here” (p. 3). Through her black female characters, Morrison delineates what needs to be done for American blacks—without condoning or resorting to the act of violence—to decolonise their mind, to restore their sense of self: “Scary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside” (p. 39). “They shoot the white girl first” (Morrison, 1997, p. 3), therefore, should not be treated or read as an actual act of brutal killing but the killing of whiteness idealised—a crucial first step that needs to be taken, as implied by Morrison’s novel, by all American Blacks.

Later in *Paradise*, through her black female character Mavis on her first visit to the convent, upon witnessing an aging, bed-ridden white nun for the first time, Morrison (1997) writes, “The whiteness at the center was blinding” (p. 46), and Mavis is reminded by ‘an authoritative voice’ while entering the room, “Don’t stare, child” (p. 46). It is clearly this intense ‘whiteness’ at the centre and its domineering voice, which insinuates Mavis’s weakness and inferiority, that have incessantly eaten away at American Blacks’ self-esteem and self-worth, as also manifested in Woodson’s (2007) *Feathers* through Frannie’s description of

light-skinned Trevor, “Trevor was light, lighter than most of the other kids who went to our school, and blue-eyed” (p. 5); Mavis is captivated by her beautiful golden skin, “The way it had so many beautiful colors in it, the way it looked all golden somehow, stopped me” (Morrison, 1997, pp. 20-21). Also, as portrayed by Woodson’s (2007) *Feathers*, the fact that the status of the newly arrived white kid at Price School has been elevated to that of the God’s son or “Jesus Boy”, that his white skin has come to epitomise virtue and purity, reaffirms how ‘blinding’, pervasive, and deleterious ‘whiteness’ can be. It is this internal force, this deeper wound inside, argues Chinua Achebe (2003) in *Home and Exile* with regard to dispossession or dispossessed people, that causes “an erosion of self-esteem” (p. 81), which could then lead to “a badly damaged sense of self” (p. 81). What has been gained on political fronts cannot eliminate deep-rooted psychological vulnerabilities and insecurities exemplified by these young characters. The triumph, if anything, only gives rise to confusion. Even after attempting to embrace her black traits, unmistakably a sign of the persistent black pride campaigns of the previous decade, by taking pride in her own dark brown skin and letting her hair “do what it wanted to do” (Woodson, 2007, p. 11), *Feathers*’s protagonist Frannie still feels like an outsider, “My skin always looked to me like it didn’t know what shade it wanted to be—dark in some places, lighter in other spots” (Woodson, 2007, p. 49), which explains why, “I felt like a stranger to myself” (Woodson, 2007, p. 11). As accurately yet painfully captured by Maya Angelou (1984) in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, “If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat” (p. 6). The

powerful message of the decade regarding black values and black pride previously put forward by the black activists, however noble and socially committed its intentions, as depicted by Woodson (2007, p. 24), is perhaps too big, too overwhelming, particularly for the young and vulnerable:

He [Rayray] was wearing this big shirt that said BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL with a black hand making a Black Power fist underneath the words. The shirt was too big for Rayray. He's real skinny, so when he wears big clothes, mostly you see the clothes, not Rayray. He slouched down in his seat and just about disappeared into that big shirt.

Although it is meant to restore racial pride, the message itself, argues Morrison (1974), is perhaps problematic, particularly when the collective sense of security of black Americans seems to rely more on their physical features, "When the strength of the race depends on its beauty, when the focus is turned to how one looks as opposed to what one is, we are in trouble" (p. 88). The 'shirt', therefore, as exemplified by the excerpt above, is too big, and Rayray is, or they all are, too small. It overwhelms them, it devours them. And with the 'blinding whiteness' still occupying the centre, imposing its 'authoritative voice', these youngsters are thus left physically and psychologically displaced, lost, disoriented—*He slouched down in his seat and just about disappeared into that big shirt*. Like Meursault, Albert Camus's (2013) outcast protagonist of *L'Etranger*, they too are outsiders, "The sense that my presence was completely pointless here made me feel as if I were suffocating, and all I want was for it all to be over quickly" (p. 95). Or if one wants to resort to the psychology of foreignisation as suggested by Kristeva (1991), these young characters are then made to psychologically perceive their very own existence as nothing but an "in

addition (...) not belonging to any place, any time, any love” (Kristeva, 1991, p. 7). Perhaps, like Meursault, they too have recently lost their ‘mothers’, or rather ‘motherland’ in this case, and are made to venture through post-civil rights, desegregated America on their own.

The excerpt above also reflects and captures the very essence of the civil rights movement, as well as the Black Power movement, their successes and failures, as a political and social force. As commented by critical race theorists, the civil rights movement of the fifties and sixties, for the most part, had their eyes set only on dismantling overtly racist political practices and social divisions—“when he wears big clothes, mostly you see the clothes, not Rayray” (Woodson, 2007, p. 24). It did not pay enough attention or even fail to recognise, as suggested by Schur (2004) that “race, racism and racialisation are not always fully intentional acts or processes but by-products of a society with a particular history and culture” (p. 297). As for the Black Power movement, though part of its goals was to instil racial pride, promote black collective interests, and advance black values, it was short-lived, and often criticised for its use of violence—*by any means necessary*, a phrase closely associated with Malcolm X (Appiah & Gates, 1999). This, however, is not to undermine their legacies. Although both reached an impasse and thus ceased to be a political and social force by the late sixties, what they left behind (e.g. *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Twenty-Fourth Amendment, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, etc.) has certainly helped improve the life of all Americans, particularly African Americans. Yet, the fact that both targeted only

overtly racist political practices and social divisions, either by non-violent or violent means, has left racism and its many faces still thriving today. For racism, particularly one that is most stressful and psychologically devastating, as greatly discussed in Chapter 1, is not only the overt and deliberate types that can be intervened legally, but the mundane ones that non-white minorities have to deal with on a daily basis, ones that are carried out on the sly to avoid legal prosecution, ones that “only its victims really know well” (Tyson, 2006, p. 367).

Also, as suggested by critical race theorists previously discussed in Chapter 1 and elsewhere throughout this study, racism is not aberrant but an ingrained part of the American cultural and psychological landscape, as fittingly captured by Woodson (2007) in *Feathers* through her eleven-year-old Frannie, “Ms. Johnson said that in other places crocuses were blooming and kids were jumping into bright blue swimming pools, right here, where we were, it was still winter. It felt like it would always be” (p. 94). America, unfortunately, has always been ‘raced’, has never been free of racism (Taylor, 2013; Morrison, 1998). Its racialised landscape, as suggested by Woodson (1994) in *I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This* through her twelve-year-old Marie, also provides these young characters with no sense of trust, “But the guy taking the picture captured something—a look I had never really seen on either of our faces—a look that said neither of those girls in the picture trusts the world” (p. 91). In his edited volume *The House That Race Built*, Wahneema Lubiano (1988) even goes a step further to argue vehemently that the basic character of contemporary America “not only harbored, but depended upon, a profound violation of the

spirit of democracy, and that fundamental violation is racism” (vii), a view that is also passionately shared by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2012) in his criticism of the first black president. Coates (2012), upon criticising the president on avoiding the issue of race entirely since taking the office, states that the political system in the US is based on two conflicting principles, “One, an oft-stated love of democracy; the other, an undemocratic white supremacy inscribed at every level of government” (p. 1). And when such a malady has been left untreated, rampant, together with the waning of the civil rights and Black Power movements, the displaced and dislocated feelings experienced by the young characters in *Feathers* and *I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This*, therefore, are inevitable. Like those living in exile, the condition they are facing is that of “terminal loss” (Said, 2000, p. 173). For the victories gained, however politically momentous, have not put an end to the enemy within.

Part of the problem, of the persistence of idealised whiteness and the internalisation of racism, states bell hooks (1994a) in *Outlaw Culture*, is that after the civil rights and Black Power movements started to wane, decolonisation of the mind and imagination and the struggle for self-determination and self-love have not been a priority of later generations of activists. As American Blacks have started to enjoy more rights, states hooks (1994a), “Many folks just assumed we had collectively resisted and altered color castes” (p. 206). Also, the fact that many African Americans could successfully become part of the mainstream through assimilation, even at the expense of their own identity, the notion of decolonisation or self-love has been

deemed unnecessary. Unfortunately, as suggested by hooks (1994a) in her critical analysis of internalised racism, “Black acceptance of assimilation meant that a politics of representation affirming white beauty standards was being established as the norm” (p. 206). And with the help of the mass media and dominant institutions in perpetuating the shifting yet persistent and systematic construction of both ‘otherness’ and ‘whiteness’ (Taylor, 2013; Bhattacharyya, Gabriel and Small, 2002; hooks, 1994a; Morrison, 1992), in attempting to, in Mori (1999)’s words, “offhandedly dismiss African-American values and make African Americans suffer unnecessarily from inferiority and self-hatred” (p. 34), once again, argues hooks (1994a), “the culture was ripe for a resurgence of color-caste hierarchy” (p. 209).

Brown v. Board of Education, with all its glories and successes, as pointed out by critical race theorist Derrick Bell (1980), was never about bettering black children’s opportunities in education and life or uprooting the existence of internalised racism and idealised whiteness. Though this historical legal case was premised on children’s self-esteem, its eye was set only on dismantling blatant racist practices and legal segregation that had devastated African Americans since 1896. The issue of internalised racism, as well as the idealisation of whiteness, unfortunately, as previously discussed in section 4.3, has never taken centre stage in American politics. Hardly has it been viewed through a political lens as part of political and structural defects but individuals’ psychological flaws. Even at the height of the civil rights movement as that America had seen in the fifties and sixties, its role was only instrumental and

peripheral. Once pressing political agendas have been successfully tackled, things get moved on, and the very issue that has devastated the black psyches for centuries gets shoved back into the hand of suffering individuals, resulting in what some refer to as the hidden injuries of race or dirty little secret (Pyke, 2010; Golden, 2004; hooks, 2003; 1995; Osajima, 1993; Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992). And with America's perpetual obsession with psychology, the blame thus tends to be directed towards the victim, rather than the structure of racial inequality (Pyke, 2010; Pyke and Dang, 2003; Herman, 1995).

It is, therefore, of the essence that various issues concerning racial injustice, including internalised racism and whiteness idealised, should be made political, and that their continuing existence and threats should be recognised as political and structural defects, not individuals' flaws, which is another reason why, I believe, Critical Race Theory is a better candidate for my current project, and why, as a recognised body of critical enquiry, it is needed in contemporary racialised America. For, as discussed in great length in Chapter 1, particularly regarding CRT's *Intersectionality*, it takes into account both overt and hidden racial injustice that has still permeated different spheres of contemporary America after the civil rights era. It is grounded on theoretical, practical, as well as 'activist' dimensions, offering new, multilayered and realistic modes to explore how various social hierarchies (gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.) intersect within power relations (Collins, 2009; Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). In addition, some of its major tenets, such as *Voice of Colour* and *Counter-Storytelling*, the two CRT tenets that will be used as my main theoretical

underpinning of Chapter 5, also take into consideration essential tools needed for psychic survival in a racialised landscape, ones that can help victimised individuals, as represented by literary characters such as Frannie and Marie, as well as other young fictional characters from the focus texts, to identify and define themselves as subjects, not objects—a crucial step towards mental decolonisation and individual and group empowerment (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1994a; 1989; Lorde, 1984). The two tenets essentially help create—to use the words taken from Toni Morrison’s (1998) essay “Home”—“Social space that is psychically and physically safe” (p. 10), so that, ultimately, America can convert itself from “a racist house into a race-specific yet nonracist home” (p. 5).

“They shoot the white girl first”, suggests Morrison (1997), “With the rest they can take their time” (p. 3). Unfortunately, as it has always been the case throughout the American history, ‘the white girl’ is spared, left unscathed, and with that, the sense of displacement and dislocation experienced by Frannie and Marie, as well as their peers, continues—“It felt like it would always be winter” (Woodson, 2007, p. 94). And yet, all through the ordeals, as child narrators in children’s books, both Frannie and Marie stay hopeful. *Feathers* stays true to Emily Dickinson’s poem included in its opening chapter—*Hope is the thing with feathers*—to the very end, giving its implied readers something to look forward to beyond its last page. Woodson’s (1994, p. 106, italics in original) *I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This* also fully embraces the notion of paradigmatic optimism, however controversial, typically found in children’s literature:

I couldn’t help thinking of this beautiful scene: Me and Sherry and
Lena walking in the park hand in hand in hand, laughing like

something out of Martin Luther King, Jr., dream, where he hoped one day little black girls and little white girls joined hands. *Yeah, I was thinking, it could happen like this.*

As a child narrator of a book intended for adult readers, observant and socially active Claudia MacTeer of Morrison's (1999) *The Bluest Eye* can put everything into perspective through sophisticated, poetic language. At times, she is even depicted to assume a role of a social critic, "This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live" (p. 164). Frannie and Marie, however, as child narrators of books intended for children, take on only a role of naïve observers, witnessing and experiencing, from the receiving end, both political and cultural changes taking place in America in the seventies and nineties. Yet, as naïve observers or ones who are acted upon, what they witness and experience, from children's viewpoints and vulnerable positions, makes the stories and the pressing issues explored in this study become more effective, current, relevant, and realistic. Their naiveté does help intensify children's vulnerability towards social changes, how they are placed in a position of helplessness and invisibility, innocent victims physically and psychologically devastated by political and structural afflictions. They inhabit social spaces that are not 'psychically safe', as expressed by Christine Wilkie-Stibbs (2008) in her critical analysis of displaced children 'in and out of the book', "They exist invisibly in spaces of constructed silence" (p. 42). Therefore, turning these child narrators from children's books into social critics or analysts, like those occupied and enjoyed by narrators in adult books, the realm to which they do not belong since the first place, would

only defeat the credibility of the story, making it unreliable, unrealistic, and perhaps unworthy of any reading experience.

In keeping with the conventional paradigm, both children's novels end on a hopeful note. *Feathers* closes its post-civil rights narrative with "the sun warm against my face", with "*each moment (...) is a thing with feathers*" (Woodson, 2007, p. 118, italics in original); *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*, on its final page, echoes our common humanity, "*We all just people here*" (Woodson, 1994, p. 115, italics in original). Their hopeful, final messages, unfortunately, do not say much about ongoing racial injustice experienced by black Americans, young and old, in contemporary America; they do not provide comfort to those who still fall victim to internalised racism and idealised whiteness and who end up feeling displaced and dislocated; and they definitely do not bring America closer to its 'post-racial' status. And yet, what is the alternative? As both *Feathers* and *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This* are books intended for young(er) readers, my theoretical positioning regarding their poetics leans more towards the argument put forward by Roni Natov (2006). In *The Poetics of Childhood*, Natov, referring to the aesthetics and excellence of children's books, suggests that "a faithful rendering of the story must not leave the child-reader in despair (...) A poetics for children requires a delicate rendering of hope and honesty" (p. 220). However forbidden or physically and psychologically devastating the story is—as that portrayed in Sapphire's (1996) *Push*—the goal, states Natov (2006), is to have it told "with the unflinching honesty that serves to witness and acknowledge the child's experience" (p. 220), so that it can "liberate children

who have encountered and internalized such experience from a belief that there is something inherently wrong with them, that they themselves are tainted” (p. 220). All of the books chosen for this study, including *Feathers* and *I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This*, recount, among others, experiences of psychological devastation as a result of internalised racism. It is argued that it would be unjustifiable for children’s books to deprive the intended child readers of ‘hope and honesty’, leaving them with the deep feeling of despair, offering no “chronicle of how one survives (...) what one retrieves from such painful experience” (Natov, 2006, p. 220). It is perhaps unfathomable or even outrageous for young readers to see young and vulnerable literary characters such as Frannie, Marie, Maleeka, or Precious achieving no redemption or visibility, instead being driven to madness and ending up at the garbage dump on the outskirts of town like what Pecola Breedlove experiences in Morrison’s (1999) *The Bluest Eye*. I will discuss further the subject of paradigmatic optimism and its place in children’s and young adult literature in Chapter 5, in relation to individual and collective strategies utilised by authors of children’s and young adult fiction to help the young characters regain and reclaim their sense of self and empowerment.

4.5 Final Words

Through the eye of a fictional child and theoretically supported by CRT, particularly its *Interest Convergence* tenet, this chapter describes what life is like for young American blacks to grow up in a world where formal racist

barriers and practices have been made outlawed. It explores the direct aftermath of post-civil rights desegregated America, as well as outlines the new set of challenges and problems facing American Blacks, particularly the young and vulnerable, causing them to feel displaced and dislocated. What has been gained on political fronts, as the focus texts seem to imply, cannot eliminate deep-rooted psychological vulnerabilities and insecurities. The triumph, if anything, only gives rise to confusion. The sense of displacement and dislocation discussed in this chapter is theoretically compared with or accentuated by the concepts of 'exile' and 'foreignisation' proposed by Said (2000) and Kristeva (1991), respectively. These two concepts are used to give insight into, and highlight what it is like, for the experience of its young characters to be 'home and exiled'.

The chapter also discusses America and its obsession with psychology. Through CRT's *Interest Convergence* tenets, it suggests that social problems in America tend to be viewed through the lens of psychology instead of politics, resulting in the blame being placed on victimised individuals as their own psychological defects rather than on structural flaws or racial inequalities. As I have argued here and elsewhere throughout the study, until these social problems, including the issue of internalised racism, are recognised as political and structural defects, the wounds, as well as the displaced and dislocated feelings as those experienced by Frannie, Marie and their peers, remain. The last section of the chapter also introduces and briefly examines paradigmatic optimism prevalent in children's and young adult literature, the issue that will be explored in depth

in Chapter 5.

Set against the backdrop of desegregated America, Jacqueline Woodson's (2007) *Feathers* and her 1994's *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*, as well as Toni Morrison's (1997) *Paradise*, should help illustrate why race, historically and politically, is still relevant in America today, and why 'post-racial' America is perhaps still far-fetched, even with an African American presence in the White House, or particularly with an African American presence in the White House. As pointed out by Paul C Taylor (2013) in *Race: A Philosophical Introduction* regarding some of hostile comments thrown at the president by his opponents and critics, "What else can explain the peculiar resonance of the claim that Mr Obama was not born in the USA, that he is, in essence, an illegal immigrant? Or the assumption that he is a Muslim?" (p. 203). Perhaps, as suggested by Coates (2012), "If Obama is not truly American, then America has still never had a black president" (p. 2).

CHAPTER 5

TRIUMPHED:

Healing the Wound of Internalised Racism through Counter-Storytelling

5.1 Introduction

There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there's a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. The act of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember.

—Toni Morrison, “In the Realm of Responsibility” (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994, pp. 247-8)

As indicated in an interview given by Toni Morrison cited in the above excerpt, it is indispensable that the horror, be it historical, intergenerational, individual or collective, is remembered, but the act of remembering, as she suggests, must be done in a way that “it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive” (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994, p. 248). Discussing the writing of his own memoir *Colored People* in “Lifting the Veil”, Henry Louis Gates, Jr (1998) reveals part of the reason or unease causing black people to shy away from remembering, from rewriting the horror confronting their own lives is that, in so doing, “Metaphorically, family secrets and racial secrets” (p. 109) are unveiled. Gates’s very own consolation lies in the fact that the act of rewriting his memory is done with truth and honesty, “I think mine is the first generation of black people in America who can afford to be this open” (p. 109).

In the previous chapters, my attempt is to capture how wounded, tongue-tied, displaced and dehistoricised these young literary characters from children’s and young adult texts have become as a result of being made part of a racialised landscape, how they are made to subscribe to the racist ideologies and idealised

whiteness and ultimately become the agent of their own persecution. The aim of this chapter is to delineate how the act of remembering, of writing, of self-translating and re-authoring one's own story helps these young characters achieve their sense of liberation, empowerment and visibility. Approaching these literary texts from a theoretical perspective of Critical Race Theory (CRT), particularly its *Counter-Storytelling* and *Voice of Colour* tenets, certain critical theoretical explanations regarding counter-storytelling can be attained for both the oppressed and dominant groups. The chapter also looks into the issue of paradigmatic optimism and its place in children's and young adult literature: How important is its role in books written for children and young adults? The literary texts used in this chapter are: Tanita S Davis's (2009) *Mare's War*, Jacqueline Woodson's (2007) *Feathers* and her 1994's *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*, Sharon G Flake's (1998) *The Skin I'm In* and Sapphire's (1996) *Push*. As in the previous chapters, Toni Morrison's (1999) *The Bluest Eye* and Alice Walker's (2004) *The Color Purple* are used as catalysts, particularly in relation to the discussion of Signifyin(g) or intertextuality.

Following are key sections detailing how the process of liberation, empowerment and being made visible is uncovered in the focus texts: (i) *Re-Authoring My Own Story*, providing critical background information on the power of storytelling or counter-narrative and its ability to empower, humanise and repair broken dignity; (ii) *A Way Forward: CRT and Its Counter-Narratives*, critically analysing the texts as well as discussing how CRT, as a recognised body of critical social theory, can be used to explain these young characters'

eventual liberation and empowerment, including how these literary texts, through Morrison's (1997, 1989) theoretical positioning on history, can be used as composite stories to represent a larger collective experience of racial injustice, or, in Gates's (1998) words, 'a new collective history' of all American blacks; (iii) *Children's and Young Adult Literature and Its Paradigmatic Optimism*, exploring how the concept of hope or optimism is treated in children's and young adult literature, the importance of its role in this literary type; and (iv) *Final Words*, providing a brief summary of the chapter.

5.2 Re-Authoring My Own Story

And no one speaks, no one tells the story about himself or herself unless forced. They don't want to talk, they don't want to remember, they don't want to say it, because they're afraid of it—which is human. But when they do say it, and hear it and look at it, and share it, they are not only one, they're two, and three, and four, you know? The collective sharing of that information heals the individual—and the collective.

—Toni Morrison, "In the Realm of Responsibility" (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994, p. 248)

Sapphire's (1996) *Push*, with its first person viewpoint, opens its testimonial narrative with such candour and force—"Some people tell a story 'n it don't make no sense or be true. But I'm gonna try to make sense and tell the truth, else what's the fucking use? Ain' enough lies and shit out there already" (pp. 3-4). Through her brutally honest, linguistically crude writing, Claireece Precious Jones or better known throughout the book as Precious, *Push's* illiterate protagonist, gets to recount a harsh reality of a dark-skinned, overweight, sexually-abused 16-year-old essentially shunned by a broader culture because of her physical appearance, skin colour, class, gender, race, and illiteracy, or what Morrison (1999), through her narrator in *The Bluest Eye*, refers to as

“matters over which the victim had no control” (p. 50). Precious’s harsh reality, portrayed in her writing as part of the book’s ‘life stories’, however painful and unsettling, is gained through her very own lived experience—“I do know what REALITY is and it’s a mutherfucker, lemme tell you” (p. 83). It is the act of telling her own story, of re-authoring her own reality, as she pushes herself towards literacy and visibility, that her sense of self and liberation and empowerment is gained. As Precious is once reminded by Ms Rain, her teacher/mentor/confidante at an alternative school Each One Teach One, after she has learnt of her own HIV infection, “If you just sit there the river gonna rise up drown you! Writing could be the boat carry you to the other side (...) telling your story git you over that river Precious (p. 97).

It is also the ability to voice or translate her own story through the act of writing that liberates and empowers Maleeka Madison, Sharon G Flake’s (1998) 13-year-old protagonist of *The Skin I’m In*. Being constantly haunted by her own dark skin, as previously discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to linguistic hegemony, Maleeka’s sense of insecurity and vulnerability unfortunately makes room for racist ideologies and idealised whiteness to penetrate her private space, her young worldview. When asked by Ms Saunders, an African American substitute teacher, to assume a life of someone living in the seventeenth century through a form of diary writing, being ashamed of who she is and of her own voice, Maleeka reinvents herself as Akeelma, an African girl sold to slavery during the Middle Passage, who, ironically, speaks only ‘proper’ English. When confronted by her friend Desda, “How come you don’t talk proper, like Akeelma

talks in her diary?" (p. 27), Maleeka replies, switching back to African American vernacular, "Don't nobody talk like that for real, only people in old movies and books" (p. 27). However, as the book progresses, Maleeka's own voice grows stronger; her sense of self, as well as her own agency, is gradually escalated. By the book's end, the ability to tell her own story through writing has helped transform or translate her into a new person, someone who is ready to stand up to her own enemy, both within and without, as she clearly delivers her final words of self-love, "Call me by my name! I am not ugly. I am not stupid. I am Maleeka Madison, and, yeah, I'm black, real black, and if you don't like me, too bad 'cause black is the skin I'm in" (p. 167).

Whilst W E B Du Bois (1989) holds a strong view on race, or what he dubs "the problem of the color-line" (p. 3), as a pivotal part of the twentieth century, which, as proven throughout this study and elsewhere, is still an unfinished business, Chinua Achebe (2003), in *Home and Exile*, holds 'the balance of stories' as an integral and pressing issue that needs to be made part of the twenty-first century's endeavours. For the act of balance, as he eloquently puts it, involves a diversity of things, and "diversity is the engine of the evolution of living things, including living civilization" (p. 97). It is the un-balance of stories, or what a contemporary Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), in her TED Talk video, calls 'the danger of a single story' that damages one's sense of self, erodes one's self-esteem, and ultimately leads to one's dispossession (Achebe, 2003). It is also the danger of a single story that leaves young characters chosen for this study tongue-tied, physically and psychologically wounded and

displaced, as discussed in the previous chapters. Stories, argues Adichie (2009), possess the power “to dispossess and to malign”; they can “break the dignity of a people”, but they can also, when balanced, “empower and humanize”, as well as “repair that broken dignity”.

Through their own language, both conventional and vulgar, shaped and informed by their own lived realities, Precious and Maleeka’s stories do empower, humanise, and repair the broken dignity of the two young black girls living in racialised contemporary America. Journeying through their stories, readers, gradually and painfully, begin to experience, almost first-hand, the other side of ‘truth’ always suppressed and discredited in the dominant discourse. Theirs, as well as many others suffering similar plights, are stories that need to be told and heard so that a more balanced and perhaps ‘fairer’ discourse can be established. Although it cannot heal all the wounds, at least, asserts Achebe (2003), “The curative power of stories can move the process forward” (p. 83).

Achebe’s (2003) espousal of a ‘balance-of-stories’ concept rings a similar tune to what has been embraced in Critical Race Theory (CRT)—*Counter-Storytelling*, a culturally powerful tool that has long been utilised by various minority groups to de/reconstruct their own reality and shape their own identity (Delgado, 2013; Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Through a theoretical lens of CRT and its *Counter-Storytelling* and *Voice of Colour* tenets, the following section details how CRT, as a recognised body of critical social theory, can be used to explain how

these young fictional characters' eventual liberation is achieved. It takes into account other strategies, both at individual and collective levels, employed by authors of children's and young adult literature chosen for this study, through their authoritative narrators and authorial voices and viewpoints, to fictionally portray certain possibilities that these young characters' sense of self and empowerment can be regained or reclaimed. Also, it suggests, how these literary texts, taken as 'composite stories', can potentially help balance the stories as well as alter the dominant discourse.

5.3 A Way Forward: CRT and Its Counter-Narratives

everi morning
by Precious j.

Everi morning
i write
a poem
before I go to
school
marY Had a little lamb
but I got a kid
an HIV
that folow me
to school
one day.

—Sapphire, *Push* (1996, p. 143)

One distinctive feature distinguishing CRT from the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s is its attention paid to how everyday experiences and common interactions of the marginalised are infected by race and racism. To expose how pervasive, systematic and thriving racism still is in America today, critical race theorists such as Derrick Bell, Patricia Williams, Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, Daniel Solórzano, William Tate, Leslie Espinoza, among many others, have resorted to a technique traditionally rooted in the social sciences

and humanities—storytelling—providing a new platform for those marginalised, previously ‘voice-less’ individuals to recount their stories. Well-told and engaging stories, contends Delgado (1989), can be used as an effective means not only to destroy mindset but also to “shatter complacency and challenge status quo (p. 2414). As the reader delves into a new and unfamiliar territory, stories, state Delgado and Stefancic (2012), can help them understand what life is like for others, which, as a consequence, can lead to “a process of correction in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity” (pp. 49-50).

Drawing on a long history of narratives or storytelling culturally embedded in different marginalised minority groups, these critical race ‘storytellers’ offer a method called counter-storytelling, with an aim, as suggested by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), “To cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (p. 159). The method itself provides an alternative or becomes a tool for the minority to analyse, deconstruct, challenge or even ‘mock’ the *majoritarian story*—“a bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant race bring to the discussion of race” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, p. 462). Using their own voice, which is often suppressed, untold and thus unheard of, counter-storytelling gives the marginalised a means to (re)construct their own stories. As illustrated in ‘everi morning’ cited above, the poem itself gives Precious an opportunity to transform the dominant discourse or the majoritarian story—

marY Had a little lamb/but I got a kid/and HIV/that folow me/to school/one day—and through it conveys a harsh reality that a black, obese, illiterate girl like her has to go through. Through her unconventional capitalisation and misspelling, though due in part to her own illiteracy, the poem gives Precious control over her own narrative, making her testimonial voice even more powerful, more credible. One of the main reasons critical race storytellers consider majoritarian stories or master narratives or what are known among postmodernists as grand narratives perilous is the fact that they are often accepted as universal truths (Harper, 2009; Tate, 1994), and that they, states Delgado (1989), provide the dominant group with “a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural” (pp. 2412). By de/reconstructing, challenging, or even subverting such a discourse traditionally deep-rooted in the dominant culture, Precious finally gets to offer to the reader a fairer, more credible, more balanced one, dictated by her own lived experience, one that, as suggested by Delgado (1989), can help ‘attack complacency’ generally brought on by majoritarian stories.

Although it is suggested that voices of the marginalised, of writers and thinkers of minorities, as suggested by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), “may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know” (p. 10), it needs to be pointed out that CRT does not promote the very concept of racial-essentialism, an idea that enables the oppressed to gain insight into the operations of oppression by the very fact of being black or brown. Rather, the ability to speak and write about race and racism, as outlined in CRT,

is learnt through the experience of racial injustice by those who live that reality or through experiential knowledge (Mutua, 2010), thus demonstrating that their voice is in fact socially acquired, not biologically inherited. This view is also shared by Clare Bradford (2007, 2010) in her discussions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children's texts, particularly from a postcolonial viewpoint. In *Unsettling Narratives*, Bradford (2007) argues that Indigenous texts are not necessarily better or more authentic than non-Indigenous texts; they are not entirely "free of stereotypes and colonial mythologies" (p. 11) when it comes to the depiction of indigeneity, as they too are infiltrated by colonial ideologies through the process of internalisation that Indigenous people have been subjected to. What makes them different, however, as she states in "Race, Ethnicity and Colonialism", which clearly reflects CRT's social-acquisition hypothesis, is the fact that "non-Indigenous texts are much more likely than Indigenous texts to recycle the assumptions of dominant cultures" (Bradford, 2010, p. 45). Therefore, an anti-essentialism thesis firmly held by CRT, particularly its counter-storytellers, still stands. As a critical social theory, CRT considers *Voice of Colour* a crucial element that should be exploited by members of an oppressed group to recount and rearticulate their own stories regarding racism or any form of social injustice—for their own individual and collective self-definitions and standpoints, which could ultimately lead to their own survival in a racist and sexist society (Collins, 2009). As precisely pointed out by Audre Lorde (1984), "If we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others—for their use and to our detriment" (p. 45).

“I was left back when I was twelve because I had a baby for my fahver” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 3)—begins Precious’s narrative. With limited writing skills due to her own illiteracy, Precious intends to capture her journey as honest and straightforward as she possibly can, “But I’m gonna try to make sense and tell the truth, else what’s the fucking use? Ain’ enough lies and shit out there already?” (pp. 3-4). Once her self-introduction is complete—“Everybody call me Precious. I got three names—Claireece Precious Jones. Only mutherfuckers I hate call me Claireece” (p. 6)—readers begin to realise this is a narrative, or rather a confession, like no other! Her writing, however unrefined and grammatically off target, as suggested by Monica Michlin (2006) in her investigation of the issue of incest and the power of narrative in *Push*, provides Precious not only with “control over the narrative voice” (p. 171), but also equips her with a sense of “self-authorization” (p. 178), giving both her story and her life a sense of validation and importance, as implied by *Push*’s author through her narrative—“Say each of our lives is important (...) Say each of us has a story to tell” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 96).

Whilst her linguistic crudeness or rather ‘honesty or uniqueness’, which is central to her writing, might give Precious control over her own voice as well as self-authorisation, as mentioned earlier, it is the ability to externalise the problem, give it a name, and put it into words that ultimately validates and liberates her, as suggested by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), “Once named, it can be combated” (p. 49). In an article exploring reflective writing as an effective means for victims of internalised racism to heal their psychological wounds and

move forward, Beth Kaufka (2009) suggests that “writing can be a powerful outlet for individuals, as active agents themselves, to understand the internal experience of oppression, to name it, legitimate it, and work through the powerful emotion attached to it” (p. 139). Through writing, states Kaufka (2009), victims, first and foremost, get to take the most crucial and necessary first step towards liberation and empowerment, that is externalising the problem—“The tesses paint a picture of me wif no brain. The tesses paint a picture of me an’ my muver—my whole family, we more than dumb, we invisible” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 30). One of the main reasons that victims of internalised racism are perpetually trapped within the vicious cycle of self-condemnation is because they hold majoritarian stories or master narratives as true representations of themselves; they have been made to believe that they are responsible. By externalising the inner pain, “Ugly black grease to be wipe away, punish, kilt, changed, finded a job for” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 31), the problem is suddenly no longer invisible. As suggested by Elizabeth Donaldson (2005) in her critical analysis of the issue of incest and sexual confession in *Push*, “Precious symbolically makes her most private business public. The hidden becomes manifest; the unspeakable is spoken” (p. 56). Once spoken or manifested, Precious’s self-acceptance starts to take shape, “When we write, we can learn self-acceptance” (Kaufka, 2009, p. 145), which is clearly shown in her poetry, “I am Precious/I am girl/I am black” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 77). And later, after being exposed to some influential black cultural icons through class readings, her sense of self is firmly established, “One thing I say about Farrakhan and Alice Walker they help me like being black. I wish I wasn’t fat but

I am. Maybe one day I like that too, who knows” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 96).

Precious’s words of self-affirmation cited above clearly echo or remind readers of Celie’s voice of growing confidence uttered towards the end of Alice Walker’s (2004) *The Color Purple*, “I’m pore, I’m black, I may be ugly and can’t cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I’m here” (p. 187). The very same utterance of self-love also gets reinterpreted and reiterated by Sharon G Flake (1998) in *The Skin I’m In* through her 13-year-old protagonist Maleeka Madison, “I am not ugly. I am not stupid. I am Maleeka Madison, and, yeah, I’m black, real black, and if you don’t like me, too bad ‘cause black is the skin I’m in” (p. 167). It is evidently Sapphire’s and Flake’s conscious and deliberate attempts to ‘signify’ upon other black texts or black authors, particularly Walker’s (2004) *The Color Purple* and Morrison’s (1999) *The Bluest Eye*, both as a critique of as well as an act of homage to their black literary antecedents. The term Signifyin(g), coined by a renowned African American scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr (1988) in his groundbreaking study of African American literary criticism *The Signifying Monkey*, is what has been generally known within literary and linguistics circles as intertextuality. Originally coined by Julia Kristeva (1980) in her seminal work ‘Word, dialogue and novel’, which is translated in *Desire in Language*, with its theoretical underpinning rooted in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1984), particularly his ‘dialogism’, intertextuality, as a type of literary allusions, sees all texts and their meanings never as isolated entities but dialogic and intertextually dependent, a plurality of voices, embodying a diversity of positions, or what is known in Bakhtin’s terms as ‘double-voiced’—“The word

in language is half someone else's (...) it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). Within the African American literary tradition, Signifyin(g), states Gates (1988), "is a metaphor for textual revision" (p. 88), which is historically considered the most distinct characteristic of African American literature. Sharing, reading, repeating, imitating, critiquing and revising each other's texts, as well as texts of the western tradition (Baillie, 2011), whether as a parody or pastiche, is an intertextual or 'signifyin(g)' practice commonly observed in black literature, "If black writers read each other, they also revise each other's texts" (Gates, 1988, p. 124), and it is principally done or manifested itself through the distinctly observable use of black English vernacular, which, as suggested by Graham Allen (2000) in *Intertextuality*, "Historically has been turned into 'non-speech' by Eurocentric, white cultural values" (p. 168). The act of Signifyin(g), therefore, argues Allen (2000), "Opens up supposedly closed, unquestionable significations (relations between signifiers and signifieds) to a host of associated meanings any monological view of language would wish to efface" (p. 167). Through the use of the black vernacular, asserts Gates (1988), the result is a long tradition of a two-toned literary heritage, or, in Bakhtinian frame, 'double-voiced': "These texts speak in standard Romance or Germanic languages and literary structures, but almost always speak with a distinct and resonant accent, an accent that Signifies (upon) the various black vernacular literary traditions" (xxiii). As the focus texts of this study, intertextually, are rooted within the African American literary tradition, with an aim, as will be

shown below, to share, repeat, imitate, critique and revise other black texts through their distinct use of black English vernacular, particularly Sapphire's (1996) *Push*, the term Signifyin(g) is, therefore, better-suited and adopted for the discussion of intertextuality, both in this chapter and elsewhere throughout this study. Also, as the literary texts analysed by Gates (1988) in his theorisation of Signifyin(g) are mainly adult texts (e.g. Walker's *The Color Purple*, Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, etc.), extending its analysis to literary texts written for children and young adults would yield a more complete picture of African American literature, thus strengthening its theoretical stance.

Gates's (1988) critical study of Zora Neale Hurston's (2007) *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a 'speakerly text', and Alice Walker's (2004) *The Color Purple* as 'rewriting the speakerly', is a testament to the pivotal role black vernacular has played in the African American literary tradition. 'Speakerly', by Gates's definition, is the way the speaking black voice or black vernacular is honoured or privileged in a black text through a written form, distinguishing it from a 'writerly' or narrator's voice, which is typically represented through standard English. Hurston's (2007) *Their Eyes Were Watching God* captures both speakerly and writerly voices, at times blending the two together as the protagonist Janie Crawford is gaining her independence and liberation, yielding, as Gates (1988) argues, "A hybrid character (...) who is neither the novel's protagonist nor the text's disembodied narrator, but a blend of both, and emergent and merging moment of consciousness" (xxvi). In *The Color Purple*,

Walker (2004) rewrites Hurston's 'speakerly text' by turning the speaking black voice into an epistolary format, thus making it written rather than spoken. Celie's self-affirmation, therefore, is gained through the act of writing. As suggested by Gates (1988), while Janie, a protagonist of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, speaks herself into being, "Celie, in her letters, writes herself into being" (p. 243). It is perhaps justified, therefore, to place Sapphire's (1996) *Push* as a direct descendant of Walker's (2004) *The Color Purple*. Like Celie, Precious, too, writes herself into being. Both Walker and Sapphire opt for the act of writing, be it epistolary or confessional, as a narrative form to fictionally portray their protagonists' journeys from invisibility to liberation and literacy.

"Things going good in my life, almost like *The Color Purple*" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 82), states Precious. As she finds herself empowered through her testimonial writing and literacy, Precious has begun to believe in fairy tales, "Ms Rain say one of the critcizsm of *The Color Purple* is it have fairy tale ending. I would say, well shit like that can be true. Life can work out for the best sometimes" (p. 83). However, as the novel approaches its conclusion, the tie that binds *Push* intertextually with *The Color Purple* gets severed. It is at this point that Sapphire's text becomes a critique of Walker's writing, not just a work of pastiche, accordingly putting *Push* on a path unexplored by its antecedent. The news of her biological father's death of AIDS brought to her by her abusive mother has turned Precious's world upside down, depriving her of 'a fairy tale ending' as that enjoyed by Celie. Fearing that her and her son might be infected, Precious turns to Alice Walker and *The Color Purple* for comfort and strength,

only to find out that there is no escape from the past, that the damage cannot be undone, that even Alice Walker, whose picture is now hung on her wall, can no longer come to her rescue, "But she can't help me now? Where my *Color Purple*?" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 87). In his analysis of Walker's rewriting of Hurston's speakerly text, Gates (1988) states that Walker resorts to pastiche, or what he refers to as 'unmotivated Signifyin(g)' or 'the absence of a negative critique', indicating that her rewriting is intended mainly to celebrate rather than mock its predecessor as that typically done in parody; it espouses, states Gates (1988), "Unity and resemblance rather than critique and difference" (xxvii), it is "loving acts of bonding rather than ritual slaying" (xxviii). Taking Gates's theoretical positioning, the ending of *Push*, then, should be classified as 'motivated Signifyin(g)', as it parodies or critiques *The Color Purple*'s 'fairy tale ending' or what Michlin (2006) calls "its mapping out of escapism in an exoticized Africa, its eventual watering down of pain and conflict" (p. 181), setting *Push* on a different path from its precursor, thus, as suggested by Donaldson (2005), making it a novel of stark realism rather than a fantasy of escape. It is apparent that the act of writing, as the author of *Push* seems to suggest, does not necessarily mean that all the past wounds will be undone and that one will always emerge unscathed, the kind of 'eventual-watering-down-of-pain-and-conflict' ending experienced by Celie, for Precious is, in the end, HIV positive. Writing can, however, as insinuated by the character of Ms Rain, equip one with a sense of redemption and self-affirmation, a tool to survive, however unkind the circumstances, "Writing could be the boat carry you to the other side (...) telling your story git you over that river" (Sapphire, 1996, p. 97).

“I was left back when I was twelve because I had a baby for my fahver” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 3)—*Push*’s opening line, intertextually, is also a reiteration or reinterpretation of Toni Morrison’s (1999) *The Bluest Eye*—“It was because Pecola was having her father’s baby that the marigolds did not grow” (p. 4). As I have mentioned earlier, *Push* is a critique of and homage to, or, in other words, ‘signifies’ upon both *The Color Purple* and *The Bluest Eye*. Whilst these novels are, in Gates’s (1988) terms, ‘speakerly texts’, giving the speaking black voice a written life, dealing with themes fundamentally permeating African American literature, such as invisibility, redemption, literacy and empowerment, their narrative structures are distinctly different, resulting in their protagonists’ paradoxical outcomes: failure and success, invisibility and liberation, self-denigration and affirmation. Told from the first-person viewpoint, together with the act of writing and the ability to re-author their own reality, both Precious and Celie are mentally equipped with the tool needed to pull themselves through, to shatter the silence, which ultimately leads them to redemption and liberation. Pecola of *The Bluest Eye*, on the other hand, does not own her own narrative. She is caught in Claudia’s, another child narrator, as well as the omniscient narrative voice, leaving her own voice, as well as her existence, unheard, silenced. Structurally, as suggested by Morrison in its afterword of the 1999’s publication of *The Bluest Eye*, the novel silences the child, “The victim (Pecola) does not have the vocabulary to understand the violence or its context (...) She is not *seen* by herself until she hallucinates a self” (Morrison, 1999, pp. 170-1, italics in original). By giving their main characters control over their own voices, genuinely told in their own black tongues,

Walker, Sapphire, Flake, as well as other authors included in this study, avoid the same pitfall faced by Pecola, and by so doing, are able to structurally construct black female characters, young and old, that are strong, independent, visible, empowered and liberated. As suggested by Michel Foucault (1990) in *The History of Sexuality*, a testimony or a sexual confession as that found in Precious's and Celie's narratives helps shatter the silence and empower the confessor; it also possesses the power to potentially change the dominant discourse (Foucault, 1990). Unlike Celie and Precious and Maleeka and other child characters in this study, Pecola is not equipped with any tool to shatter the silence—*she is not seen by herself until she hallucinates a self*. Her doom is, therefore, inescapable, "It's too late. At least, on my edge of the town, among the garbage and the sunflowers of my town, it's much, much, much too late" (Morrison, 1999, p. 164). Morrison's portrayal of young, ill-fated Pecola, as being discussed throughout this study, particularly in relation to the theoretical lens of CRT, reflects what it is like to grow up in a racist society where your own reflection is perversely distorted by the dominant discourse, where the majoritarian story is unfairly made your story, until you ultimately succumb to defeat rather than triumph.

Part of the reasons causing majoritarian stories or master narratives to become acutely destructive, as discussed earlier, is the fact that they have become naturalised or hegemonic. Also, argues Kaufka (2009), "We [the oppressed] intuit our stories of injustice, but discount them because they do not match the stories of the dominant group. We distrust ourselves" (p. 143). It is clearly this

sense of self-distrust or betrayal that helps explain why Precious, when asked to say something good about herself to the class, can only come up with “Nuffin” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 46), why initially she can only see herself through the white gaze, “Precious is a blue-eye skinny chile whose hair is long braids, long long braids” (p. 64); why Maleeka Madison tries her hardest to rid herself of any linguistic association with Black English in her diary writing, “I want to hold onto the sun for as long as I can. To save up the picture for when I am below again and need to remember that the sun is always shining. I squeezed my eyes closed till I see stars” (Flake, 1998, p. 104); and why Mare of Tanita S Davis’s (2009) *Mare’s War* constantly resorts to linguistic self-correction whenever her black tongue resurfaces. Precious, Maleeka and Mare, as well as other young characters chosen for this study, do not believe that who or what they are is good enough. One possible solution, therefore, as suggested by Kaufka (2009), is to reclaim one’s authorial position, taking back the power to re-write or re-author one’s own story from one’s very own perspective. What can be achieved through re-authoring, contends Kaufka (2009), is the fact that one not only gets to “inherently revise the relationship with the problem” (p. 143), but also “to practice resistance on the page” (p. 143).

Re-authoring, as a healing process, also resonates the notion known within the field of postcolonial studies as self-translation. In its literal ‘textual’ definition, translation, states Robert J C Young (2003), is a direct transformation of the text’s material identity. However, as he also argues, translation cannot take place on an equal one-to-one basis, particularly when it comes to cultural

translation, “No act of translation takes place in an entirely neutral space of absolute equality (...) Someone or something is being translated, transformed from a subject to an object” (p. 140). Within the framework of colonialism, unfortunately, as Young (2003) observes, “The colonial copy becomes more powerful than the indigenous original that is devalued” (p. 140), turning the whole enterprise into “the process of domination, of achieving control, a violence carried out on the language, culture, and people being translated” (p. 140). Through majoritarian stories or master narratives or the dominant discourse still prevalent in contemporary America, the identity of Precious and Maleeka, as well as other young characters in this study, has been transformed; psychologically, they have been translated from subjects to objects. Self-translation, therefore, is the act of reclaiming, of taking control of one’s own copy as a translator, not a translated (Young, 2003), which, in Precious’s and Maleeka’s case, is done through storytelling, through taking back their own authorial positions—“TYGER TYGER/BURNING BRIGHT/That’s what in Precious/Jones heart—a tyger” (Sapphire, 1996, p. 128).

In one of the most noted articles coming out of CRT “Legal Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative”, Richard Delgado (1989) asserts that stories are of great benefit for both the oppressed and the dominant groups. For the former, ‘psychic self-preservation’ can be achieved through the act of storytelling (Delgado, 1989). As extensively discussed in Chapter 1 and elsewhere in this study, an erosion of self-esteem, as well as self-condemnation, is symptomatic of those suffering internalised racism (Kaufka, 2009; Achebe,

2003; Delgado, 1989). The ability to tell stories, in their own voice, can help victimised individuals heal their psychological wounds as well as restore their sense of self—"By becoming acquainted with the facts of their own historic oppression (...) members of outgroups gain healing" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2437). Whilst Frantz Fanon (1963) in *The Wretched of the Earth*, as well as some leaders of the Black Power movement of the fifties and sixties (see Chapter 4 for further discussion on American politics in the fifties and sixties), believes in a much more drastic measure, resorting, at times, to violence—an eye for an eye—as a source of healing, critical race storytellers hold storytelling as a way forward, for it leads one, as suggested by Delgado (1989) to a "realization of how one came to be oppressed and subjugated. Then, one can stop perpetrating (mental) violence on oneself" (p. 2437). As for the latter or the dominant group, counter-stories can help improve their own reality. As reality is socially constructed (Delgado and Stefancic, 2013; Tate, 1994; Delgado, 1989), which, as discussed above, often results in majoritarian stories being treated as cultural norms or universal truths (Harper, 2009; Tate, 1994), listening to stories of those who have been historically, socially and culturally wronged or 'othered' can help one triumph over ethnocentrism or ethnic encapsulation (Banks, 2013; Kruse, 2001) and "avoid intellectual apartheid" (Delgado, 1989, pp. 2439-40).

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, the terms "double consciousness" and "two dimensions" coined by Du Bois (1989) and Fanon (1967), respectively, suggest how psychologically wounded the oppressed have become by living in a racist society or under a colonial rule. Both discuss how the very act of judging

oneself through the eyes of the dominant others, of living in two incompatible cultures, “Two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (Du Bois, 1989, p. 3), can give rise to one’s total psychological destruction. By having been made to subscribe to the dominant discourse and ultimately become the agent of one’s own persecution, the ‘two’ seem even more irreconcilable. However, through the act of storytelling, of re-authoring one’s own story, argues Kaufka (2009), one is allowed “to be multiple and conflicting, to be fluid and complicated which often relieves the guilt and shame of those struggling with internalized racism” (p. 143). Kaufka bases her argument on the concept of psychotherapy called ‘dialogical self’ put forward by Hupert Hermans and Harry Kempen (1993), which is grown out of Mikhail Bakhtin’s literary analysis known as dialogism. Whilst Bakhtin’s dialogism views one piece of literature as having a continual dialog with other pieces of literature and other authors (Bakhtin, 1981), Hermans and Kempen’s notion of dialogical self regards self as multiple, as “a dynamic process with many possibilities” (Kaufka, 2009, p. 145), thus allowing one to own “a multi-voicedness that represents a diversity of positions” (Kaufka, 2009, p. 145). The notion of ‘self’ or ‘identity’ as being multiple, fluid, conflicting, decentred, or deterritorialised, once again, calls to mind the politics of identity previously discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to postmodernism (see detailed discussion as well as my theoretical positioning in Chapter 3, Section 3.4). This multiplicity of self or multi-voicedness, which is made possible by counter-storytelling, I believe, is of the essence, for it allows individuals like Precious and Maleeka, Erika and Mare, Frannie and Marie not only to take charge of their own mental battles, but also to be both black and

American at the same time, instead of feeling trapped between “two unreconciled strivings: two warring ideals in one dark body” (Du Bois, 1989, p. 3).

In their article entitled “Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research”, Daniel G Solórzano and Tara J Yosso (2002) group counter-stories into three different categories: personal stories, other people’s stories and composite stories. Personal stories and other people’s stories capture experiences of racial injustice encountered by the marginalised either in a form of autobiography or biography, using first person and third person voice, respectively (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Together, they make composite stories, which, as suggested by Harper (2009), “are useful for representing the often disregarded experiences of a larger group through a smaller subset of ‘characters’ who represent the group” (p. 702). Under this classification, fictional accounts recounted by these young, black female characters, therefore, can be classified as personal stories, as they all delineate heart-wrenching, psychologically devastating experiences of racial injustice through their first person viewpoints. And together, they too make composite stories. Although their depictions are fictionalised, as I have previously argued both in Chapters 3 and 4, these first-person fictional narratives are dynamic, offering, through authoritative narrators and authorial voices and viewpoints, realistic accounts of what it is like to be young and black and female in contemporary, racialised America. As world-affiliated cultural objects (Said, 1983), these children’s and young adult novels are shaped and informed by

cultural practices of contemporary America, obtained through the authors' research, memories and recollections, together with the act of imagination, which, as suggested by Morrison (1998), result in both "the actual and the possible" (p. 197). Therefore, not only can these composite stories help keep these young characters from inflicting further psychological pain on themselves, their stories as a whole can also help defeat ethnocentrism and ethnic encapsulation (Banks, 2013; Kruse, 2001; Delgado, 1989), which could then help 'balance' the master stories (Achebe, 2003), and potentially change the dominant discourse (Foucault, 1990). As suggested by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *The Post-Colonial Critic*, it is of consequence, particularly for members of the dominant group, to 'unlearn' their own privileges, "The holders of hegemonic discourse should de-hegemonize their position and themselves learn how to occupy the subject position of the other" (Harasym, 1990, p. 121).

Also, as these composite stories represent a larger collective experience of racial injustice, should they not be included as an integral part of African American history? As suggested by Toni Morrison (1989), history is not about a master narrative that comes equipped with a predictable and determined conclusion. Rather, it is about individuals who are not part of a "monumental history", whose lives "are much more chaotic, contradictory, and unpredictable—which creates a necessary space for resistance, agency and counternarratives" (Peterson, 1997, p. 209). Morrison's treatment of history suggests that "history is first of all a story—a set of stories African-Americans need to tell and retell in order to create the foundation for a livable life and a

viable future [and that] historical understanding must be dynamic and constantly reworked if it is to be useful” (Peterson, 1997, p. 215). She approaches it from small and local narratives, from the everyday lives of ordinary black folks who have been previously neglected (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4 for detailed discussion of African American history). The discussion of the young characters’ sense of displacement as that seen in Chapter 4 through Jacqueline Woodson’s (2007) *Feathers* and her 1994’s *I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This* should provide a good example of the danger of approaching history from a ‘master-narrative’ perspective. Although the civil rights movement, politically and historically, has indisputably done a great service to all Americans, it has been reduced, as suggested by bell hooks (1994a), to the bravery of a few good men, leaving stories of those ordinary folks forgotten—“Ones who formed the spine on which the televised ones stood” (Morrison, 1997, p. 212). As a result, not only has the history been made flawed, the displaced and dislocated feeling, as that experienced by Woodson’s young characters, has also been made inevitable.

However, through Morrison’s theoretical positioning towards history, the composite stories portrayed in fictional texts written for children and young adults chosen for this study are made relevant; they become a pivotal part of African American history, for they too help create “a necessary space for resistance, agency and counternarratives” (Peterson, 1997, p. 209). It is through these credible and authentic counter-stories, ones that are “part of no grand record or even its footnotes” (Morrison, 1997, p. 212), that America can

establish “the foundation for a livable life and a viable future” (Peterson, 1997, p. 215). Morrison’s view on history is also shared by another contemporary African American scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr in his discussion of black women’s writings in America today. In “Lifting the Veil”, Gates (1998) suggests that these small narratives written by ordinary people who are members of a “historically oppressed or narratively excluded group” (p. 111) are collectively and historically worth exploring and discussing, as they are “a new collective history” (p. 111), which essentially is part of “the larger narrative of the Negro in America” (p. 111). Also, as I have previously argued in Chapter 3, through this ‘small-narrative’ historical positioning, the reading of Tanita S Davis’s (2009) *Mare’s War* suddenly becomes more relevant and meaningful in contemporary America. For it helps disclose not only America’s unfair treatment of its plural histories, but also, as expressed by Jameson (1998), its obsession with ‘perpetual present’, its ability to relegate “recently historical experiences as rapidly as possible into the past” (p. 20), without much regards to its historically, linguistically, and multi-ethnically diverse reality (Wolfram 2010; Gounari and Macedo, 2009). By validating Mare’s story and the existence of African American women taking part in World War II represented in the text, Tanita S Davis therefore helps the reader realise the missing chapter of American history, thus making fictional works, as argued by Wilkie-Stibbs (2008), Morrison (1998) and West (1993b), as discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2, valuable, authentic and valid as world-affiliated cultural objects.

One of the criticisms, however, that has often been made regarding children’s

and young adult literature, as also illustrated by the six novels included in this study, is its paradigmatic optimism, its fictional representations of young and naïve protagonists possessing the ability and strength, both within and without, to overcome their own misfortune, however distressing or dire the circumstances (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2008; Bradford, 2007; Natov, 2006). Against the system of racial injustice and racist ideologies that is found in the novels chosen for this current project, authors of these children's and young adult texts, perhaps deliberately, create young characters that are not only sympathetic, well-developed, dynamic and credible, but also ones who refuse to be silenced or kept out, offering, as a result, their implied child readers something to look forward to beyond the book's final page—"Me and Sherry and Lena walking in the park hand in hand in hand, laughing like something out of Martin Luther King, Jr., dream, where he hoped one day little black girls and little white girls joined hands" (Woodson, 1994, p. 106). How pivotal a role does paradigmatic optimism play in the creation of literary texts written for children and young adults? Is it the code typically observed by most children's and young adult authors? The next section is aimed at addressing this very concept, as well as providing theoretical perspectives behind its conventional use.

5.4 C&YA Literature and Its Paradigmatic Optimism

A good story lets you know people as individuals in all their particularity and conflict; and once you see someone as a person—flawed, complex, striving—then you've reached beyond stereotype. Stories, writing them, telling them, sharing them, transforming them, enrich us and connect us and help us to know each other.

—Hazel Rochman, "Beyond Political Correctness" (2008, p. 27)

Whilst its narrative on post-civil rights, desegregated America is saturated with the feelings of displacement and dislocation, of loss, of one being made exiled in one's own home, *Feathers's* final message is that of hope, of a better tomorrow, its firm grasp on Emily Dickinson's long-lasting line is unwavering, "I put my head on Mama's shoulder and close my eyes, the sun warm against my face (...) *Each moment, I am thinking, is a thing with feathers*" (Woodson, 2007, p. 106, italics in original). *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*, Jacqueline Woodson's (1994) Coretta Scott King Honour, on its final page, echoes once again our common humanity, "*We all just people here*" (p. 115, italics in original). At the end of a long and tiring journey, as a veteran of World War II, as a daughter and now a proud grandma, *Mare's War's* protagonist finally receives recognition she deserves, "Somehow as she walks away from the graveyard, putting the past and the darkness behind her, she seems taller" (Davis, 2009, p. 341). And as previously discussed in this chapter, both Precious and Maleeka, protagonists of *Push* and *The Skin I'm In*, respectively, through the act of writing, of re-authoring their own realities, have ultimately found their own voices, become their own translators, however disconcerting and harrowing the circumstances, particularly for a sexually abused victim like Precious; both have managed to emerge (almost) unscathed. All through the ordeal, these child characters, as suggested by Wilkie-Stibbs (2008), are fictionally created not "to be subsumed into the inhospitable system that would exclude, silence, and erase their existence" (p. 45). Is paradigmatic optimism then a discernible trait, or a 'must', in literary texts written for children and young adults?

As I have briefly stated at the end of Chapter 4, the final messages of hope commonly found in these literary texts, unfortunately, do not say much about ongoing racial injustice still plaguing many American blacks in contemporary America; nor do they provide comfort to those who still fall victim to internalised racism and idealised whiteness, which often result in their being psychologically wounded, tongue-tied, displaced and dehistoricised, as demonstrated throughout this study. However, as these are literary texts intended for young readers, what, then, is the alternative? To shed light on this unique characteristic widely employed by its authors, arguably, as an integral part of children's and young adult literature, perhaps what needs to be established, first and foremost, as suggested by Peter Hunt (2005) in *Understanding Children's Literature*, is the fact that books written for children are *different* from those intended for adults, "They are written for a different audience, with different skills, different needs, and different ways of reading" (p. 3), but the experience children bring into the text, as he argues, is as "rich and complex" (p. 3) as adults'. Therefore, to impose the same value systems on children's books, Hunt (2005) states, "Then we give ourselves unnecessary problems" (p. 3). This 'difference', as also supported by Roni Natov (2006) in her investigation of the aesthetics and excellence of children's books in *The Poetics of Childhood*, is reflected through or requires "a delicate rendering of hope and honesty" (p. 220). As she firmly asserts, "A faithful rendering of the story must not leave the child-reader in despair" (p. 220). The story, however forbidden or distressing physically and psychologically—as that seen in Sapphire's (1996) *Push*—should be told with candour, or what Natov (2006)

argues, with “the unflinching honesty that serves to witness and acknowledge the child’s experience” (p. 220), so that it can “liberate children who have encountered and internalized such experience from a belief that there is something inherently wrong with them, that they themselves are tainted” (p. 220). All of the novels included in this study are complex, multi-layered, narrating, among many others, experiences of psychological devastation as a result of internalised racism. It is argued, therefore, that it would be unfair or (narratively) unjustifiable if they were to be deprived of ‘hope and honesty’, ultimately leaving the intended child readers with the deep feeling of hopelessness, offering, states Natov (2006), no “chronicle of how one survives (...) what one retrieves from such painful experience” (p. 220). It is also unfathomable, as also discussed in the previous chapter, for young readers to witness young and vulnerable literary characters such as Precious, Maleeka, Frannie, Marie, or Erika, after such a struggle in a racialised landscape, achieving no redemption or visibility, instead being driven to madness and ending up at the garbage dump on the outskirts of town like what Pecola Breedlove experiences in *The Bluest Eye*.

Ralph Ellison, discussing the novel and its key characteristics in “Society, Morality and the Novel” (Callahan, 2003), states that “by its nature the novel seeks to communicate a vision of experience” (p. 700). When successfully executed, this very experience, however complex, should ultimately help us achieve what he refers to as a form of ‘communion’, both between the text and reader, and particularly between reader and reader. Ellison’s concept of

'communion' also calls to mind Aidan Chambers's transformational texts. In "Axes for Frozen Seas", Chambers (2008) asserts that for children's literature to achieve any recognition it deserves, it needs to be transformational. Children's books should behave like axes that smash the frozen seas, which mean complex, multi-layered, thematically diverse and linguistically rich. For such qualities, states Chambers, can help "enrich in some degree our image of the world and its being; they help illuminate me, and others for me, and the society I live in, as well as the societies that other people live in" (Chambers, 2008, p. 12). Children's and young adult texts included here, I believe, possess such transformational qualities: complex, dynamic, multi-layered, and linguistically rich (see the discussion of 'speakerly' texts in 5.3 above, as well as Chapter 3, for more on linguistic richness). Their realistic representations of the life of young black girls in contemporary America, as well as the triumph these young characters are made to achieve through the novel's paradigmatic optimism, help shape the view of the self, the other and the world of the outside child or the reader of both the oppressed and dominant groups. For the former, as discussed earlier, psychic self-preservation can be attained (Delgado, 1989). Also, as suggested by Marta Collier (2000) in her study of the power of African American children's literature, these novels not only help black children see themselves in their own stories through narrative immersion but they also become a "cultural mirror image which would reflect their place in the world as valid, valuable, and voiced" (p. 235). As for the latter, these stories, which are 'experiential' in nature, can potentially enrich their realities, as well as help them be more aware of ethnic encapsulation, a misguided view that one's ethnic

group is more superior than others (Banks, 2013). Also, as suggested by Bradford (2007), these counter-stories, as those seen in this study's focus texts, can help the dominant group, or what she refers to as 'non-Indigenous' children, appreciate differences among diverse cultures, as well as become aware that the depicted ideologies and their perceived universality are in fact socially constructed. What these two groups of outside children attain through the act of reading clearly reflects the purpose of the literary work passionately voiced by Aidan Chambers, cited in Gary M Salvner (2001), that "it is conciliatory, comforting us in our shared humanity; and that it is subversive, challenging our prejudices and ingrained attitudes" (p. 11). It offers, as also suggested by Mukherjee (2014), "something away from the self, a vista of a bigger, wider, different world outside [...] its capacity to imagine *the lives of others*" (Mukherjee, 2014, my italics). Perhaps, as suggested by Ellison (2003)—a form of communion.

Taking Hunt's, Natov's, Ellison's and Chambers's stances into consideration, hope or optimism prevalent in children's and young adult literature, therefore, does not signify that 'eventual watering down of pain and conflict' (Michlin, 2006), or that misconstrued, sugarcoated 'happily ever after' typically associated with this type of literary texts. Rather, its hopeful and optimistic nature is displayed through or translated into a form of transformational texts with complex, multi-layered, thematically and linguistically rich qualities, told with "unflinching honesty", reflecting the child's experience. It is literary texts peopled with, as suggested by Rochman (2008) in her essay on the politics

surrounding children's literature, "Individuals in all their particularity and conflict (...) flawed, complex, striving" (p. 27), with an aim to reconcile and comfort, to subvert and challenge existing prejudices and entrenched racial views (Salvner, 2001). Also, taking the idea of Signifyin(g) into account, particularly within the African American literary tradition, as previously discussed in this chapter, these children's and young adult texts are not isolated cultural entities but dialogic and intertextually dependent, consolidating a diversity of voices and positions. Like their adult counterpart, these texts are constructed out of the larger cultural or social context, containing in them, as suggested by Allen (2000), "The ideological structures and struggles expressed in society through discourse" (p. 36). Their meanings, whether as a parody or pastiche, as a critique or homage, to draw on Roland Barthes's (1977) notion of intertextuality, are not 'filiated', or properties of individual authorial awareness, but 'affiliated' (Said, 1983), drawn from the body of both children's and adult literature of the past, "To write is (...) to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'" (Barthes, 1977, p. 143). Seen through this Signifyin(g) viewpoint, these children's and young adult texts, consequently, should be as valuable and valid as cultural objects as any other type of literature, not a 'lesser' kind, as often dubbed (Hunt, 2005). The fact that their child narrators are often depicted only as naïve observers, witnessing and experiencing social, cultural and political changes and turmoil from children's viewpoints and vulnerable positions without any critical contributions, like those found in adult literary texts, does not necessarily mean that the story is diminished or weakened. After all, children are not social critics (Wilkie-Stibbs,

2008). If anything, as I have argued in Chapter 4, it only helps intensify their vulnerability and invisibility, how they are made to inhabit social spaces that are psychically unsafe. Turning them into social critics or analysts, like those occupied and enjoyed by narrators in adult books, the realm to which they do not belong since the first place, would only defeat the credibility of the story, making it unreliable, unrealistic, and perhaps unworthy of any reading experience. The message of hope and optimism permeating children's and young adult literature, therefore, is only its *different* trait, not a flaw. It is this unique quality, or what Natov (2006) refers to as 'a delicate rendering of hope and honesty' in the midst of despair, its ability to unsettle us (Rochman, 2008) that sets it apart from others. Perhaps, such is a *raison d'être* that any literary text, regardless of its audience, should strive for, so long as it is equipped with the tool, like Aidan Chambers's axes, to smash the frozen seas.

5.5 Final Words

This chapter, with the help of CRT's *Counter-Storytelling* and *Voice of Colour* tenets, encapsulates the benefit of re-authoring one's own story and reality. It delineates, through counter-storytelling, how one can shatter the silence and assert one's own agency, in order to become empowered, liberated and visible. As all the literary texts investigated in this study deal primarily with young characters psychologically wounded and displaced by internalised racism, the ability to tell their own stories, to become their own translators, in their own black tongue, affords them a chance to begin anew. Counter-storytelling, as

these focus texts suggest, helps keep these characters from inflicting further psychological pain on themselves. Also, their stories can help members of the dominant group appreciate cultural differences, improve their own reality, as well as become more aware of ethnocentrism or ethnic encapsulation (Banks, 2012; Bradford, 2007; Kruse, 2001; Delgado, 1989). I have also argued that these literary texts, although fictionalised, should be categorised as composite stories, as they all delineate heart-wrenching, psychologically devastating experiences of racial injustice through their first person viewpoints (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). And as composite stories representing a larger collective experience of racial injustice in contemporary America, they too should be made a consequential chapter of African American history, or what Gates (1998) refers to as “a new collective history” (p. 111), which can then be used to heal both the individual and the collective (Morrison, 1994), as well as balance the stories (Achebe, 2003), and alter the dominant discourse (Foucault, 1990).

The chapter also discusses the issue of paradigmatic optimism prevalent in children’s and young adult literature. My arguments lie heavily on theoretical standpoints proposed by critics of both children’s and adult literature (e.g. Chambers, Ellison, Hunt, Natov, etc.), indicating that the text, however distressing or complex the experience, needs to be transformational, that it needs to be told with “unflinching honesty”, and most importantly, it should offer the child reader “chronicle of how one survives (...) what one retrieves from such painful experience” (Natov, 2006, p. 220), so that the child is not left in total despair. Also, seen through the Signifyin(g) viewpoint, these children’s

and young adult texts are constructed out of the larger cultural and social context, embodying diverse voices and positions. Optimism or hope, therefore, is a unique trait of this literary type, a *difference*, not a flaw.

I would like to end this chapter, once again, by revisiting Toni Morrison's (1988, p. 5) inspiring thought on storytelling taken from "In the Realm of Responsibility" quoted at the outset of section 5.2:

No one tells the story about himself or herself unless forced. They don't want to talk, they don't want to remember, they don't want to say it, because they're afraid of it—which is human. But when they do say it, and hear it and look at it, and share it, they are not only one, they're two, and three, and four, you know? The collective sharing of that information heals the individual—and the collective.

CONCLUSION

'Cause Black Is the Skin I'm In

It didn't matter to him how much money I had. As far as he was concerned I did not fit as the owner of that stately house because of the way I looked. In America's public discourse, "Blacks" as a whole are often lumped with "Poor Whites." Not Poor Blacks and Poor Whites. But Blacks and Poor Whites. A curious thing indeed.

—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah* (2013, p. 166, italics in original)

Today, disproportionate number of blacks and other non-whites remain economically and socially disadvantaged and subordinated (...) despite the election of Barack Obama, the first African American president of the United States. Said differently, the system of racial hierarchy (...) remains alive and well.

—Athena D Mutua (2010, p. 276)

In her latest novel *Americanah*, Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2013), through her female protagonist Ifemelu, makes a keen observation regarding the present reality of 'race, racism and racialisation' in America, particularly its relation to the 'black presence'. Writing in her anonymous lifestyle blog called *Raceteenth*, Ifemelu offers to her 'Fellow Non-American Blacks' the following words of advice, or perhaps 'warning': "When you make the choice to come to America, you become black"; "If you are a woman, please do not speak your mind (...) strong-minded black women are SCARY. And if you are a man (...) never get too excited, or somebody will worry that you're about to pull a gun"; "When a crime is reported (...), stay well away from the crime area for weeks, or you might be stopped for fitting the profile"; and above all, "Black people are not supposed to be angry about racism. Otherwise you get no sympathy" (pp. 220-221).

Like Adichie's new novel, my current study has also looked at America from the view of an outsider. Whilst Adichie's is an observation on race, racism and racialisation made subjectively from a distance by her 'Non-American Black' adult character, mine delves into the psyche of young African Americans, exploring how racism is internalised, particularly its devastating psychological manifestations, through the eye of a fictional child, with Critical Race Theory (CRT) as my key theoretical underpinning. Both, however, are an outsider's take on contemporary American racial landscape. And as an outsider looking in on racialised America, one is in a position to bring to the table certain viewpoints that are distinctly different, more acute than those that have been normalised, and arguably uninfluenced by otherwise conventional social norms and obligations, ones that can enrich both fictional and theoretical stances of the issue of race in America, and this is one of the aims and outcomes of this study. As pointed out by Delgado and Stefancic (2012) at the end of their book on Critical Race Theory, "Perhaps if the new outsider scholars (...) persist, their work in time will come to seem not so strange or even radical, and change may come to American society, however slowly and painfully" (p. 150). Thus, as an outsider looking in, this study has enriched race scholarship and its scarcely explored terrain, *Internalised Racism*, particularly in critical literary research representing the province of children's and young adult literature. It has made visible the ever presence of race and its detrimental effects in contemporary America, particularly towards the young and vulnerable, as depicted by the authors of the focus texts.

This very journey I have taken, which is both personal and theoretically driven, begins with stories penned by contemporary African American children's and young adult authors. These six unique stories compellingly capture the life of African American girls caught in a racial tide and wounded by self-inflicted psychological mutilations, girls who have been socially and psychologically programmed to equate black with inferiority and white with beauty and superiority. Tracing their journeys from self-denigration to self-affirmation, from invisibility to liberation and empowerment, these young characters and the texts they inhabit have become more than just passing 'stories', but, as referred to by Gates (1998), "A new collective history" (p. 111). Told from the first-person viewpoint with a distinctly observable use of the 'black voice', these personal stories or confessions, as I have argued throughout this study, particularly in Chapter 5, should be categorised as composite stories (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002), as they embody, as Harper (2009) asserts, "The often disregarded experiences of a larger group through a smaller subset of 'characters' who represent the group" (p. 702). And as composite stories representing a larger collective experience of racial injustice in contemporary America, they should be made an integral part of American history, which, as suggested by Morrison (1994), can be essentially used as a tool to heal both the individual and the collective.

My main argument regarding the concept of history discussed in this study, based on Toni Morrison's (1998, 1997, 1989, 1987) and Henry Louis Gates's (1998) theoretical positioning, lies in the fact that it is not about master or

grand narratives that come equipped with predictable and determined conclusions, but a mixture of small and local narratives chronicling everyday lives of ordinary black people who have been previously neglected or historically denied, as demonstrated by all of my focus texts, as well as Morrison's novels cited throughout this study. Through these children's and young adult texts, which detail painful experiences of those suffering internalised racism, a significant part of racial injustice in contemporary America has been brought to light.

Morrison contends that fiction, particularly its total access to the character's 'unwritten interior life' through both factual details and, in particular, the act of imagination, can be potentially historically more factual than actual historical documents, a point also shared by Wilkie-Stibbs (2008) in her study of 'docu-novels' (see detailed discussion in Chapter 3, Section 3.2), mainly because it is not written from the dominant standpoint or infiltrated by ideological partisan perspectives, as argued by Kimberly Chabot Davis (1998), "Our access to history is always limited by words and by those who have control of textual production" (p. 249). It is mainly this limited access to history that Morrison has attempted, through most of her novels, to redefine and reconstruct, both at a personal and national level, a new chapter of African American history, "There is not suitable memorial—or plaque, or wreath, or wall, or park, or sky-scraper lobby. There's no three hundred foot tower (...) And because such a place doesn't exist that I know of, the book had to" (Morrison 1991, cited in Rody 1995, p. 98). Like Morrison's novels, I have stressed that these children's and

young adult texts are also part of that mixture of everyday, small narratives that are integral in redefining and reconstructing, particularly, the history of contemporary America. An ability to access the character's 'interior life', which is made possible by the act of imagination, as I have previously argued in Chapter 3, is also fundamentally crucial in this study, as it helps these children's and young adult authors to fictionally reconstruct inner psychological wounds of those haunted by internalised racism in ways that factual evidence alone is perhaps inadequate or less powerful in drawing the reader's belief and sympathy. I am claiming, then, that it is this line of arguments that makes children's and young adult texts chosen for this study not only valuable, authentic and valid as world-affiliated cultural objects (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2008; Morrison, 1998; 1997; 1989; 1987; Said, 1988), but also an important set of historical records or 'a new collective history' of America (Gates, 1998).

At the end of *Push*, Sapphire (1996) includes four more stories, unpagged, of other young female characters who also attend Higher Education Alternative/Each One Teach One, seemingly turning the whole book into a classroom project called 'Life Stories', with its main portion devoted to the life of its protagonist Precious. Like Precious's, each of the four additional life stories recounts, from its author's lived experiences, both physical and psychological scars of being black and female (and gay) in contemporary America. Sapphire's conscious and deliberate utilisation of the notion of 'Life Stories' as part of her narrative structure evidently echoes or is informed by an autobiographical form of 'Life Writing', allowing her young characters to

recount their own realities from an authorial position. As suggested by Lauren Rusk (2002), the narrative process of life writing, particularly in relation to the concept of 'otherness', "is driven by the urge to author one's own story and identity" (p. 9), which, as also put forward by Justine Baillie (2011) in her study of life writing and postcolonial identities, "is central to the expression and reclamation of the displaced and dislocated self" (p. 318), one of the key points I have extensively explored and argued for both in Chapters 4 and 5 (see also the discussion of 'self' or 'identity', particularly in relation to postmodernism in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.). As a novel, *Push* thereby affords these young female characters, Precious especially, a safe space to recount and re-author their own stories, however painful and unsettling the experience might be, in an attempt to eclipse the white gaze and ultimately equip these fictional female characters with a sense of empowerment and visibility.

These life stories, argues Folasade Hunsu (2013) in her article entitled "Engendering an Alternative Approach to Otherness in African Women's Autobiography", are instrumental in helping "the female subject to appropriate the privileged position of the subject-speaker and determine the course of her otherness" (p. 173). My study argues, therefore, that, seen through a theoretical frame of CRT, particularly its *Voice of Colour* and *Counter-Storytelling* tenets, *Push*, as well as other children's and young adult novels chosen for this study, has become part of a larger network of 'Life Stories', and together they have come to form not just 'composite stories' with historical significance as previously discussed, but also 'counter-stories', which, as storytelling goes, are

integral in creating a space for resistance and agency for both the fictional and outside child. Counter-stories, which insist on the experiential knowledge (Mutua, 2010), as I have argued throughout this study, particularly in Chapter 5, provide an alternative or become a tool for the minority to analyse, deconstruct, challenge or even ‘mock’ the *majoritarian story*, giving them a new platform to reconstruct their own realities, which is often untold, suppressed or discredited in the dominant discourse. It is the ability to re-author or self-translate their own stories, through their own black tongue, that helps fictional characters such as Precious, Maleeka, Erika, Frannie, Marie and Mare to take charge of their own mental battles, to shatter the silence and assert their own agency so that ultimately they can escape the vicious cycle of self-condemnation. The very act, therefore, allows them to be both black and American at the same time.

I have also asserted that counter-stories are beneficial in shaping the view of the self, the other and the world of the outside child or the reader of both the minority and the dominant groups. For the former, ‘psychic self-preservation’ can be achieved, enabling, in particular, victims of internalised racism to view their own image as “valid, valuable, and voiced” (Collier, 2000, p. 235). As for the latter, or the dominant group, reading or listening to stories of those who have been historically, socially and culturally wronged or othered can potentially cause them to become more aware of the harm caused by ethnocentrism or ethnic encapsulation (Banks, 2013; Kruse, 2001). Also, it helps them to appreciate differences among diverse cultures, to envisage “the lives of others” (Mukherjee, 2014), as well as to realise that the depicted

ideologies and their perceived universality, like the concept of race, are in fact socially constructed (Bradford, 2007). As I have mentioned in Chapter 5, what these two groups of outside children have gained through reading or listening to these counter-stories clearly reflects the purpose of works of fiction asserted by Aidan Chambers, quoted in Gary M Salvner (2001), that “it is conciliatory, comforting us in our shared humanity; and that it is subversive, challenging our prejudices and ingrained attitudes” (p. 11). I have stressed throughout my discussion of counter-storytelling that, other than healing the wound of internalised racism, which is crucial for all the characters from the focus texts, as well as shattering complacency and challenging status quo, another equally important aim and outcome I am claiming is to balance the master stories or narratives and to alter the dominant discourse (Achebe, 2003; Foucault, 1990). It is the unbalance of stories, as I have argued in this study, that damages these characters’ sense of self, causing them to become ‘tongue-tied’, physically and psychologically wounded and displaced. By making their stories part of a larger web of ‘counter-stories’ or ‘a new collective history’, not only is the silence shattered and the victims empowered, the dominant discourse itself, as suggested by Foucault (1990), is or can also be altered.

I have discussed in this study that literary texts are essential in bringing into the limelight various social issues and phenomena. Based also on Toni Morrison’s (1998) thesis on the importance of fiction and its blend of facts and imagination, these children’s and young adult texts distinctly and imaginatively make visible the inner psychological scar of those haunted by internalised

racism. Though fictionally constructed, I have stressed that these first-person, dictated-by-lived-experience narratives are dynamic, multi-layered, thematically and linguistically rich, offering, through authoritative narrators and authorial voices and viewpoints, credible and compelling accounts of what it is like to be young and black and female in contemporary, racialised America. As world-affiliated cultural objects, shaped and informed by cultural practices of contemporary America, and obtained through the authors' research, memories and recollections, together with the act of imagination, these texts clearly defamiliarise what otherwise has become normalised in American racial discourse, which, in this case, is the issue of internalised racism. By revisiting this racial issue, they make us aware why the problem exists and persists, what possibly lies at its foundation, and offer, through their counter-narratives, possible means for victimised individuals, especially, to move forward, to become empowered, liberated and visible. If, as suggested by Davis (1998), the access to "history is always limited by words and by those who have control of textual production" (p. 249), then what these texts have done or achieved is hand the rights to stories back to those who have actually lived those harsh realities. In other words, I argue, they have helped reconstruct a different social reality (Delgado and Stefancic, 2013), based on an African American experience, one that is not dictated only by those in control of textual production, so that a more balanced and fairer discourse can be established. Also, as the texts' readership is children and young adults, I find their characters more fluid, not sedimented or cataclysmic as those typically found in adult literature, and their fluidity certainly opens up space to intervene. And since these young characters

are being made, or are going through the process of becoming rather than being already formed, they therefore provide an interestingly unique space for discussion. It is for these reasons that I have found this text type worth researching, especially when it comes to the issue of internalised racism, as this very issue, as I have discussed at the outset of the research, affects children or young adults, whose characters are being formed or who are in the process of becoming, more than adults.

As the principal theory informing this thesis is Critical Race Theory (CRT), it is worth discussing at this last stage, therefore, how a theory originally developed for legal purposes has helped transform a literary landscape in the ways I have opened up here, particularly its relation to the issue of internalised racism, which is very much understudied in both adult and children's and young adult literature. My initial decision to draw on CRT as my key theoretical framework to approach the focus texts, which are charged with racial conflicts, other than the obvious fact that it was a 'race' theory, was because of its limited role in literary studies, children's and young adult literature in particular. Relatively few scholarships coming out of literary research utilise CRT as part of their analyses, and only partially and indirectly, as I have discussed in Chapter 1; and they tend emphasise only on one aspect of this race theory, particularly its *Intersectionality*, leaving aside and untouched other tenets, such as *Everyday Racism*, *The Social Construction of Race*, *Interest Convergence*, *Differential Racialisation*, *Voice of Colour*, *Counter-Storytelling*. These otherwise neglected tenets, as has been proven at different stages by this study through the life of

young fictional characters, are equally crucial and thought-provoking. Through its *Everyday Racism*, *The Social Construction of Race*, *Differential Racialisation* and *Intersectionality* tenets, together with the notion of ‘controlling images’, CRT has convincingly helped explain how these characters were harmed psychologically (Chapter 2), and how the linguistic violence was unfairly committed (Chapter 3). Through its *Interest Convergence*, which was the main tenet used in Chapter 4 as my theoretical frame, structural defects resulting from political and social changes explained and exposed the characters’ sense of displacement and dislocation. And through *Voice of Colour* and *Counter-Storytelling*, two main tenets employed in Chapter 5, CRT critically shed light on these young characters’ eventual empowerment, liberation and visibility, explaining what could be accomplished through the act of storytelling, particularly self-authoring, consequently turning these literary texts, as I have discussed both in this chapter and elsewhere, into an important set of historical records as a new collective history. Through a combination of these major CRT tenets, the study has made it possible to delve deeper under the skin of this racial issue portrayed in contemporary African American children’s and young adult literature, critically analysing, from different theoretical positions, its various contributing factors, including the personal, historical, socio-political, as well as the individual and collective. This unique theoretical stance clearly sets it apart from previous studies on race, whose critical lenses, as mentioned earlier, are focused on just one aspect of CRT and only indirectly (e.g. Frever, 2009; Rogers and Christian, 2007; Michlin, 2006; Enekwechi & Moore, 1999;). And since these tenets, theoretically, allow a wider access to the same topic

from different angles, the result, therefore, is a more thorough, multilayered, and multidimensional racial analysis that is uniquely African-American.

As a recognised body of critical enquiry and grounded on theoretical, practical, as well as 'activist' dimensions, this study has also shown that CRT is fitting and favourable as a theoretical tool to critically and analytically explain racial issues depicted in literary works for some of the following reasons. First of all, it takes into account both overt and hidden racial injustice that has still permeated different spheres of contemporary America after the civil rights era. I have argued all through this study that race/racism is still very much part of the American landscape: "[It is] endemic to the American normative order and a pillar of American institutional and community life" (Mutua, 2010, p. 275). Its manifestation, both overtly and latently, as depicted in the focus texts, ranges from everyday encounters to its institutionalisation, as asserted by Bernard (2011), in America "race is, indeed, the story of where we come from, and how we still live" (p. 14, see detailed discussion in Chapter 1, Section 1.3.). It is these different forms of racial injustice that make Precious psychologically wounded, that result in Maleeka, Erika and Mare being tongue-tied and dehistoricised, and that cause Frannie and her peers at Price School the sense of loss and displacement. However, through CRT and its major tenets, particularly *Everyday Racism*, *Differential Racialisation* and *Interest Convergence*, these everyday, hidden wounds have been magnified and scrutinised, made relevant, stressing that it is in fact structural flaws, not personal defects that have done the damage. With the help of CRT, these children's and young adult texts have

pushed racism and its many faces to the fore, making it more difficult to argue that America has now entered its post-racial stage.

Secondly, I have asserted that, as a theoretical tool, CRT offers multilayered and realistic modes of analysis to explore how various social hierarchies (gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.) intersect within power relations, the notion known within its framework as *Intersectionality* (Collins, 2009; Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Through this very tenet, this study, particularly in Chapter 2, has revealed that one's identity is complex, multidimensional and that it is not based on race alone but intersects with other factors such as class, sex, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, political and personal history. And when a minority, as demonstrated by literary characters from the focus texts, occupies more than one of these categories, s/he will inevitably experience multiple forms of oppression. These young characters' sense of self-loathing and displacement, as well as their being dehistoricised and linguistically violated, clearly does not stem only from their being black but also female, exacerbated by their poverty, plus, in case of Precious—obesity and illiteracy. It is all these factors combined that have aggravated or contributed to their self-hatred. Through *Intersectionality*, however, all these issues or concerns have been addressed and explained, thus resulting in a more thorough racial analysis and interpretation.

As I have already discussed in Chapter 1 under the review of primary texts, although the focus of this study is on female characters, it needs to be pointed

out that this particular racial issue is not strictly a black female experience. For males, such as Forty-seven, a protagonist in Walter Mosley's (2005) historical novel *47*, or a group of male students in Spike Lee's (1988) *School Daze*, or even some of the minor characters in the focus texts, for instance, are also caught in the same web of self-hatred, which, as illustrated by this study, is most devastating particularly for the youngsters who are in the process of becoming, or, as suggested by hooks (1994a), who are "striving to construct positive identity and healthy self-esteem" (p. 211). Yet, whilst both are oppressed by their race, black men, argues Collins (2013), are "privileged by their gender" (p. 14) (see more discussion of racial oppression experienced by black men and black women in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.). This, together with the notion of *childhood* or *youth*, the point I have raised and argued for in Section 2.3 of Chapter 2, as well as below, is part of the main reason that the focus of my research is given only to the female characters, for they have come to represent lived experiences or realities of those who are most powerless, who actually occupy the bottom of social ladder, (see more discussion of *Intersectionality*, particularly its relation to class and sex, in Chapter 2, Section 2.2). However, whilst gender might play a significant role particularly towards the application of *Intersectionality*, this study as a whole has offered transparency that is not muted by this factor.

Whilst *Intersectionality* is often praised for its embrace of intragroup 'differences', of taking into account in its analysis various aspects of one's complex identity, I have argued also that it needs to take into its theoretical

premises another equally integral element, for a more thorough analysis, particularly in relation to this study, and that is *childhood* or *youth*. Being young and vulnerable, African American children and young adults, as implied by the authors of the focus texts, are more likely and easily to be influenced and harmed by images, values and norms sanctioned by the dominant group, at the expense of their own obliteration. And, as discussed in Chapter 2, due to their 'temporal immaturity and inexperience' and their relative 'absence of agency' (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2008), together with the fact that these are individuals whose characters are being formed or who are in the process of becoming, children and young adults are often placed at a disadvantaged position. By making *childhood* or *youth* part of its theoretical and analytical frame, this study has shown that CRT's *Intersectionality* is even richer and more practical in approaching different groups of people without conflating, trivialising or oversimplifying their realities or experiences. When things are examined from the perspective of individual agents or what Delgado and Stefancic (2012) refer to as *perspectivism*, any attempt, be it theoretical or practical, to understand the plight of intersectional individuals is made plausible. When it comes to analysing racial issues, it is therefore essential, as proven by this study, that *Intersectionality* is made part of the analysis, that it is part of the social landscape. For without which, any well-intended efforts that are meant to tackle racial issues might appear fruitless.

Thirdly, and most importantly, some of its major tenets, such as *Voice of Colour* and *Counter-Storytelling*, also take into consideration essential tools needed for

psychic survival in a racialised landscape, ones that can help victimised individuals, as represented by young fictional characters such as Precious, Maleeka, Erika, Frannie, Marie, and Mare, to identify and define themselves as subjects, not objects—a crucial step towards mental decolonisation, as well as individual and group empowerment (Collins, 2013; 2009; Hunsu, 2013; hooks, 1994a; 1989; Lorde, 1984). Also, my arguments above regarding these two tenets, which insist on contextual and historical analysis (Mutua, 2010), should help establish these children's and young adult texts as part of a larger network of 'composite stories' and 'counter-stories', which is not only historically significant but also integral in creating a space for resistance and agency for both the fictional and outside child. Not only have these texts, as suggested by Winnifred R Brown-Glaude (2010) regarding the current black women scholarship, helped put "the experiences of black women at the center of analysis" (p. 801), but, to reiterate Morrison's words (1998), they have also created "social space that is psychically and physically safe" (p. 5) so that, ultimately, America can convert itself from "a racist house into a race-specific yet nonracist home" (p. 5), where, as portrayed by these young characters, African Americans can be both black and American at the same time.

It is also worth emphasising at this point, particularly in line with my discussion and use of CRT's *Intersectionality* as part of my theoretical and analytical tool, that this study is strictly an African American experience, as seen through fictional representations of African American children's and young adult literature. It would be presumptuous or unjust to extend its results to other

experiences, real or fictional, undergone by other nonblack minorities, or to assume its universality by conflating or oversimplifying experiences of other groups. For doing so would defeat CRT's theoretical ground and result in this literary research being theoretically ill-founded. I have stressed all through this study, particularly in relation to CRT's *Differential Racialisation* and *Intersectionality*, that each nonblack minority group has been racialised in the dominant discourse in its own way, encompassing, as discussed above and elsewhere, various intersectional factors. Historically, socio-politically and economically, each experience of racial injustice that each group has endured or been subjected to cannot be substituted by any other, be it physical or psychological. What these characters have gone through as young African Americans is dictated or informed by an African American experience, which is distinctly different from that of other minority groups. Combining their experiences as one by, as suggested by Patricia Hill Collins (2012), being tempted to "prematurely synthesize things into a tidy story" (p. 15), or by putting whites at the centre would only lead to binary thinking, not only causing members of these marginalised groups to go against each other but also diminishing their group solidarity (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Research from other experiences or groups, whether literary or empirical, therefore, needs to be carried out, using CRT as its theoretical frame, before any conclusion or comparison can be drawn, to avoid such pitfalls, as well as to contribute, assess or even challenge CRT's theoretical foundation.

Previously in this chapter, as well as at the outset of this research, I have stated that my research is both personal and theoretically driven. Whilst the personal side is what has made me vocal and seen me through, however mentally difficult the journey might be at times, it is the theoretical side that has substantiated my passion, giving this piece of literary research meaning, enriching both race and literary scholarships. I have also argued earlier that my focus texts have defamiliarised the issue that has been normalised in the American racial discourse, therefore, another outcome that this study has achieved is systematically scrutinise such normalisation and offer to the reader a more balanced and fairer discourse. And as it is not an insider's take, the view gained is, once again, uninfluenced by otherwise conventional social norms and obligations.

At the end of her Pulitzer Prize winning *Beloved*, an historical novel portraying the horror of slavery, as well as attempting to redefine history from the voice of everyday people who have been historically denied, Toni Morrison (2005) repeatedly injects the following sentence into her epilogue, "This is not a story to pass on" (no pagination). As her book is intended to capture the forgotten voices of those who have been "disremembered and unaccounted for" (no pagination), the reading of the words 'to pass on', therefore, yields only one meaning, namely 'to avoid', unambiguously making *Beloved* a story that needs to be read. Like Morrison's (2005) *Beloved*, these children's and young adult novels are also not the ones to pass on. As a representation of contemporary America and seen through the eye of a fictional child, these small voices or

narratives do matter, and, as suggested by Morrison's (2005) *Beloved* and Amoko (2009), should be acknowledged and accounted for—to help America redefine and reconstruct its plural history, as well as to secure and offer its alternative future.

As her narrative of Celie's triumph is drawn to a close, Alice Walker (2004), as an author and medium, leaves her readers of *The Color Purple* with the following last words—"I thank everybody in this book for coming" (p. 262). I would like to thank Precious, Maleeka, Erika, Frannie, Marie, and Mare—for coming, for sharing, and, above all, for surviving. It is perhaps fitting to end this study with the following words of insight offered by Collins (2013, p. 16, my italics) in her attempt to secure a place for black women and their scholarships in the twenty first century:

Individual Black Women resisted their place as objectified props and aimed to tell their stories. In doing so, they crafted the dynamic, collective voice of Black feminist thought. I encourage each of you to write, edit, and rewrite your own stories until they ring true to you. Armed with thoughtful interpretations of our lived experiences we can collectively craft new interpretations of shared realities. *Imagine the possibilities for our world if we do.*

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